

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

Wednesday 23 June 1999

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

Mr I.H. Venning

**Members:**

The Hon. R.B. Such  
 Mr S.G. Condous  
 Mrs R.K. Geraghty  
 Mrs E.M. Penfold  
 Ms J.M. Rankine  
 Ms P.L. White

*The Committee met at 11 a.m.*


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Department of Education, Training and  
 Employment, \$1 311 564 000

Administered Items for Department of Education,  
 Training and Employment, \$268 629 000

**Witness:**

The Hon. M.R. Buckby, Minister for Education, Children's Services and Training.

**Departmental Advisers:**

Mr G. Spring, Chief Executive, Department of Education.  
 Ms H. Kolbe, Deputy Chief Executive.  
 Mr B. Treloar, Director, Corporate Services.  
 Ms E. Swiecicka, Director, Strategic Response.  
 Mr R. Bos, Assistant Director, Finance.  
 Ms D. Davis, Executive Director, Metropolitan Services.  
 Mr J. Halsey, Executive Director, Country Services.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Welcome to Estimates Committee B. As all members would be aware, the Committee hearings are relatively informal and there is no need for anyone to rise when questions are asked or answered. The Committee will determine the approximate time for consideration of proposed payments, to facilitate the changeover of departmental advisers. I ask the Minister and the Opposition spokesperson whether they have agreed on a timetable for today's proceedings and, if so, request that the Minister advise the Committee on such timetable.

Changes to the composition of the Committee will be notified as they occur. Members should ensure that they have provided the Chair with a 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 submitted no later than Friday 4 July to the Clerk of the House of Assembly.

I propose to allow time for the Minister and the lead speaker for the Opposition to make opening statements, if desired, of about 10 minutes but no longer than 15 minutes. There will be a flexible approach in relation to giving the call for the asking of questions, based on three questions per member, alternating sides. Members will also be allowed to ask a brief supplementary question to conclude a line of

questioning, but any supplementary question will be the exception rather than the rule. Statements of 30 to 40 seconds will be permitted.

Subject to the convenience of the Committee, members outside the Committee who desire to ask questions on a line of questioning will be permitted to do so once the line of questioning on an item has been exhausted by other members of the Committee. An indication to the Chair in advance from the member outside the Committee wishing to ask a question is necessary.

Questions must be based on lines of expenditure as revealed in the Estimates Statement; therefore, it would be helpful if reference is made to the relevant budget documents, including the Portfolio Statements. Questions not asked at the end of the day may be placed on the next sitting day's House of Assembly Notice Paper.

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 of Assembly; that is, that it is purely statistical and limited to one page in length. All questions are to be directed to the Minister through the Chair, not to the Minister's advisers. The Minister may refer questions to his advisers for a response if he so desires. I also advise that for the purposes of the Committee some freedom will be allowed for television coverage by allowing a short period of filming from the northern gallery of this Chamber. I invite the Minister to detail an agreed program and introduce his advisers and make a brief opening statement if he wishes.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I will make an opening statement. We will deal with Children's Services after the opening statements, followed by SSABSA. At 12.25 p.m. we will start on schools and continue with them until 4.30 p.m., at which time Minister Brindal will appear to take questions on employment and youth.

This Government is committed to the high standard of education of our young children and youth in South Australia. I believe that this budget further underpins the high standing that this State has within Australia. It is not a budget of just one change; it is a budget of change over time. The South Australian education system has operated (probably until 1994) with relatively little change over the past 20 years. Since 1994 this Government, through the previous Minister (Hon. Rob Lucas) and now me, has instituted a system of change—not change for the sake of change but change that really makes a difference and in order to make things better.

This Government inherited a school system from Labor that was run down, union dominated and concerned primarily with senior secondary schooling. I refer, in particular, to the backlog of minor maintenance works throughout schools in South Australia. As a Government, we are still trying to catch up with that backlog of maintenance works which is sitting there and which will cost many millions of dollars.

Our program of renewal began in 1994; it has continued to this day and it will continue over the remainder of the term of this Government. This Government has restored the balance between the early and later years of schooling, and not, I might add, at the expense of one or the other: we have not robbed Peter to pay Paul. The previous Minister instigated the \$32 million early year strategy. If under this strategy we can identify at a very early age the problems that young people may have with either literacy or numeracy, we can use

our resources to correct those problems so that they do not exist in their later school years.

We have helped young children with communication problems. When we came to Government there was a crying need for an increase in the number of speech pathologists. The number of speech pathologists in schools has been increased by 72 per cent since the last days of Labor. This Government introduced the basic skills test so that the level of literacy and numeracy in our schools could be determined, and funds have been targeted directly to those children performing in levels 1 and 2 to ensure that they get extra resources to lift their levels of literacy and numeracy.

At the other end of the school system, we have brought new meaning to vocational education. This Government has given students the types of courses for which they have been crying out. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the push was towards university, and the subjects offered in our senior secondary schools were designed to do exactly that. The closure of Goodwood Technical High School in 1991 meant that those young people who were not oriented towards university, did not have the necessary skills or did not want to go, had nowhere to go. Bringing back vocational education has given those young people a direction in life and the prospect of further training once they leave secondary school.

This is a great success story with the number of students in Government schools increasing from 2 400 in 1997 to over 10 000 this year. A new vocational college was opened at Windsor Gardens earlier this year, and this morning I announced a second vocational college to be sited at Christies Beach High School. A cluster of eight high schools, with Christies Beach being the core high school, will be involved in the delivery of this second vocational college. This will deliver increased opportunities for young people in the south. It gives that linkage between industry, community and schools to ensure that those young people can undertake vocational education training that leads them into a TAFE institute, a private provider or industry so that they have skills when they walk through the door on day one and the industry does not have to then train them again.

The Government's success stories do not end there. Let us look at information technology. First, a reminder that the amount of money spent by the previous Labor Government in its last year in government was \$360 000. This Government, over a five year plan, has committed \$85 million in DECS*tech* 2001. We have world class technology based networks in and between our schools across Australia and our schools now have access to the Internet. We are on track to deliver one computer for every five children in our classrooms. We have a TAFE system that is attracting world wide acclaim for some of its programs. I only have to mention the Regency Institute of TAFE and the tourism and hospitality courses that are available there. For example, under Le Cordon Bleu a restaurant management course has been set up at Regency: it is the only one in the southern hemisphere and is undertaking the training of young people from all over the world.

The Government is the first to formally acknowledge the different needs of schools and children's services in the country. Earlier this year, we undertook country consultations. We conducted 56 different meetings throughout the country and Mr John Halsey, whom I appointed as the Director of Country Services, liaised with people in the country to look at the requirements and how we can better deliver education into our country schools. We have also paid attention to Aboriginal education. Only a few weeks ago I

released a plan for Aboriginal education over the next four years. It involves the parents of those students working with the school to ensure that we get the best outcomes in literacy, numeracy and school attendance for those young Aboriginal students.

Of all the reforms undertaken by this Government, Partnerships 21 will be the most far-reaching. This is a quantum leap in terms of education in South Australia. What this delivers to our schools is the ability for them to make the decisions in their local community and for those decisions to fit in with what those schools want within their local community. It takes the decision making away from the bureaucracy, placing it in the hands of the school council, the principal and the community. It really does achieve community schools and gives ownership to the community of those particular schools. It means that they have the choice—something which is a little bit foreign to the Labor Party—to come into Partnerships 21. There is no down side in terms of any disbenefits to those schools not opting to come into Partnerships 21: they still receive the same amount of money. The beauty of this is that they are given a global budget in October. They can see what money they have to spend for the full 12 months and can then make their own decisions. The schools retain 100 per cent of any savings that they make, and I believe that there are savings to be made. That will be a significant change on the face of South Australian education.

I turn quickly to the budget. The 1999-2000 budget presentation incorporates the new outputs developed during the year and this form of presentation will be used in the future. It is a progression from the interim output classes presented in the 1998-99 budget. The budget for the Department of Education, Training and Employment contains no additional cuts over those announced in 1998-99. The budget has increased by \$14 million. In addition, a provision has been made in the Treasury's round sum allowances for the balance of the enterprise offer made to teachers and related employees. The budget includes an additional \$5 million for three years of employment initiatives. The Government has supported the continuation of Ready, Set, Go funding for a further three years at a slightly higher level, that is, \$4.5 million per annum, so \$13.5 million in total.

The budget provides for an amount of \$3.2 million for Partnerships 21, these funds to be used for staff and parent training programs. Additional funding of \$10 million is provided for information technology initiatives. Some \$5.5 million has been provided out of DECS*tech* for cabling and other equipment in schools to link computers on site and to facilitate further Internet access. An additional \$14.7 million has been provided for capital works, and it should be noted that \$11.1 million has been provided specifically for capital works in the country. Finally, program maintenance and minor works receive an increase of 31 per cent. As I have said, there is a significant backlog there that we had inherited.

There can be no greater compliment than one that is paid by a think tank of the Labor Party. In its 'State of the States' report the Evatt Foundation, which is the left wing think tank for the Labor Party, rates South Australia No.1 in the nation on the delivery of education and the amount of money we spend on education. When you have the Opposition's economic think tank telling you that you are the best, what more questions can there be?

**Ms WHITE:** This year, despite the Government's increasing expenditure in the 1999-2000 budget by almost

\$450 million, the Minister has confirmed that Treasury is to cut its funding allocation to education by \$39.3 million. The Minister has also confirmed publicly that the three year 1998-99 to 2000-2001 Department of Education, Training and Employment budget strategy document, which was leaked to the Opposition last year and which has been tabled in *Hansard*, was still correct. That document identified a \$62.8 million 'total budget task' for his department. The Minister has also stated publicly that the difference between this level of savings that his department has to make and the cut to his department from Treasury would be made up from cash reserves. On those figures, that difference is \$23.5 million, based on what the Minister has confirmed publicly. Last year in Estimates the Opposition questioned the Minister about each of the nominated savings in his department's document entitled 'Proposed savings strategies' and he confirmed those.

The question this year is: if the Minister is to make up all his shortfall from cash reserves, with which cuts is he going ahead and which proposed savings will instead be met by those cash reserves? We will also be interested to find out which of the \$48.6 million of savings nominated for 1998-99 went ahead and which were from cash reserves. We will examine the level and use of cash reserves which are currently sitting at \$142.8 million and which have risen from \$86 million in July 1998, especially in light of an apparent surplus of funds generated in reserve during a period of severe cuts to schools and TAFE institutes.

We have many questions on the Minister's implementation plans for local school management under Partnerships 21 and on the Government's priorities in TAFE and the vocational education and training sector under the recently regrouped Office of Vocational Education and Training. In line with the precedent set by Estimates Committees yesterday I would now like to read into *Hansard* the omnibus questions that the Opposition is putting on notice for all Ministers.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The votes before the Chair will remain open all day. I will give the Minister the chance to make comment, if he wishes, as the honourable member goes through the omnibus questions.

**Ms WHITE:** In relation to all departments and agencies for which the Minister has Cabinet responsibility, including relevant junior Ministers:

- List all consultancies let during 1998-99 indicating to whom the consultancy was awarded, whether tenders or expressions of interest were called for each consultancy and, if not, why not, and the terms of reference and cost of each consultancy?
- Which consultants submitted reports during 1998-99, what was the date on which each report was received by the Government, and was the report made public?
- What was the cost for the financial year 1998-99 of all services provided by EDS, including the costs of processing of data, installation and/or maintenance of equipment, including the cost of any new equipment either purchased or leased through EDS, and all other payments related to the Government's contract to outsource information technology to EDS?
- During 1998-99 were there any disputes with EDS concerning the availability, level or timeliness of services provided under the whole of Government contract with EDS and, if so, what are the details and how were they resolved?
- Which of your agencies are buying new desk top computers prior to year 2000 and, if so, how many, at what cost and what is the manufacturer of the product and what models are being purchased? What is the hardware and software that has been replaced or identified for replacement to achieve Y2K compliance, and at what cost? Did or will these replacement purchases go to tender?
- How much did agencies within the Minister's portfolio spend in contracting the services of Internet providers during 1998-99, and which Internet providers were involved?
- Detail how many FTEs are employed by agency in 1998-99 for Information Technology services, and detail the figures for 1995-96, 1996-97 and 1997-98?
- What are the names and titles of all executives with salary and benefit packages exceeding an annual value of \$100 000, which Executives have contracts which entitle them to bonus payments and what are details of all bonuses paid in 1998-99?
- What are the names and titles of staff who have been issued with or have access to Government credit cards, for what purpose was each of these cards issued, and what was the expenditure on each card for 1998-99?
- What are the names and titles of all officers who have been issued with Government owned mobile telephones, what arrangements apply for the payment of mobile telephone accounts, and what restrictions apply to the use of Government mobile telephones for private purposes?
- What was the total number and cost of separation packages finalised in 1998-99?
- What is the target number of staff separations in the 1999-2000 budget, how many TVSPs have been approved by the Commissioner for Public Employment for 1998-99, and what classifications of employee have been approved for TVSPs in 1999-2000?
- How many vehicles by classification were hired in 1998-99, and what was the cost of vehicle hire and maintenance in that year?
- List all employees with the use of privately plated cars in 1998-99 and outline what conditions are attached to the use of the car by the employee.
- Did any of the Minister's agencies rent vacant or unused office space during 1998-99 and, if so, what was the cost of rent or lease of this unused office space to the taxpayer?
- Are there any government owned premises within the Minister's portfolios that are not currently occupied, what is the cost of holding these properties and where are they located?
- Will the Minister detail all executive and staff development exercises undertaken by the Minister's agencies during 1998-99?
- Will the Minister list all occasions during 1998-99 on which executive staff of the agencies under his portfolio entertained guests at taxpayer expense, all those present on the occasion, the purpose of the occasion, and the cost to the taxpayer?
- How many staff originally from within the Minister's portfolios were on the redeployment list in 1998-99, for how long have they been on redeployment and what are their classifications?
- How many public help lines did the Minister's agencies operate during 1998-99, which were located in South Australia and which were operated from interstate? Is there information about what issue(s) each help line was

intended to provide and what was the cost to the taxpayer of operating each help line?

- What are the names of the public servants in your portfolio and which, if any, of your ministerial staff currently serve as Government representatives on the boards of management of other bodies? What is the category of the board in question, what is the remuneration paid to these individuals for service on each board and at what level of classification are these employees?
- Please detail all interstate and overseas travel undertaken during 1998-99 by members of Government boards, their destination, purpose, cost and all individuals who travelled?
- Please detail all advertising and promotional activities and campaigns undertaken by all the agencies within your portfolio for 1998-99, what issue(s) were the concerns of these activities, of what did these activities consist, how much did they cost and what activities are planned for 1999-2000?
- Please detail all local, interstate and overseas conferences attended during 1998-99 by the Minister, his staff and public servants within the Minister's portfolio, including the cost, location and purpose of the conference?
- Please provide the name(s) of any former member of State or Federal Parliament within the Minister's portfolio currently serving as a board member, a member of the Minister's staff or a public servant, and detail their duties and remuneration.
- Have any agencies within your portfolio 're-badged' or otherwise made presentational changes during 1998-99 through changes in letterheads or other stationery, signage and so on, what was the reason for the change and what was its cost?
- Has there been any refurbishment of your ministerial office or that of any of your CEOs during 1998-99, what was the reason for the refurbishment and what was the cost?
- Since the 1997 State election, have any of your ministerial staff taken up permanent employment in the South Australian public sector; please name the individuals concerned and indicate the vacancy for which they applied? Were these positions advertised and, if so, when and where?
- Please name all your ministerial staff and their classification and remuneration.
- Please name all staff attached to junior Ministers and their classification and remuneration, and advise if they have ministerial cars with drivers, cars without drivers, or access to ministerial cars or drivers, and on what basis?
- During 1998-99 what Government land or other real estate has been disposed of, where were these properties located, did the sale involve a tender process, for how much was each property sold, who purchased the property and who acted as agent and/or legal adviser to the sale?

That concludes the omnibus questions on notice to the Minister.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckley:** There was a large number of questions. Obviously, there is a lot of work to be done to obtain that material. I am aware of a two week time frame. We will get that information back to the honourable member as quickly as practicable. I do not know whether I will be able to supply that within two weeks: all I can guarantee the honourable member is that we will get all that information to her as soon as we possibly can.

**Ms WHITE:** In my opening statement I referred to the leaked budget documents which the Opposition had obtained last year and which have been incorporated in *Hansard*. The Minister has confirmed the authenticity of those documents and indicated that the figures are correct. I draw the Minister's attention to the figure of \$62.8 million under 'Total Budget Task for 1999-2000' in that document. The Minister has said publicly that these figures are correct. Is that still the case?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckley:** The budget task given to me by the Treasurer was to find \$39.3 million of savings. That is what the Treasurer has asked me to do, and that is what we have complied with.

**Ms WHITE:** As a supplementary question, I did not ask about the net budget task but about the total budget task as outlined in that leaked document, not the \$39.3 million but the \$62.8 million. Is that figure still correct?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckley:** A number of programs come in and out of the department. For instance, people are brought in to develop a piece of curriculum and will be in the department for only a certain period, and we will have a figure in the budget to take account of that. As I said to the honourable member, the \$39.3 million is the savings task that was asked for by the Treasurer. I will hand over to Mr Bronte Treloar, the Financial Services Director, who might be able to expand a little further on that.

**Mr Treloar:** The Minister has explained that the Government's savings task is \$39.3 million for the 1999-2000 financial year. In the document to which the honourable member refers I can see reference to the \$62.8 million. I guess it is simply a matter of going further in relation to that figure.

**Ms WHITE:** Is that figure still correct?

**Mr Treloar:** That figure moves almost hourly.

**Ms WHITE:** The Minister has publicly confirmed that it is correct. Are you now saying that that figure is no longer correct?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckley:** We stand by that budget paper. The correct figure is \$39.3 million in savings which we were asked to come up with by the Treasurer. As I said, a number of programs come in and out of our budget on a yearly basis. As Mr Treloar has said, that figure changes from week to week, sometimes from day to day. The figure we were asked for by the Treasurer was \$39.3 million to meet that savings task, and that is it.

**Ms WHITE:** I do not have an answer to my first question, Sir.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You can try again, but the Minister can answer the questions how he wishes.

**Ms WHITE:** The department is getting \$39.3 million less from Treasury. These leaked budget documents giving a three-year strategy show that the total budget task last year was \$62.8 million. The Minister has publicly confirmed that figure, and the remainder of the document shows a total of \$65 million in funding sources from within the department. The Minister is clearly avoiding addressing this issue. He has publicly confirmed the figures in that document. However, the Opposition has obtained another leaked, more recent document that indicates that the figure of \$62.8 million has blown out to \$72.8 million, that an extra \$10 million in savings has to be made from the department. Is that correct?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckley:** The budget task asked of us by the Treasurer has not changed at all.

**Ms WHITE:** That is not the question I am asking you.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order! The Minister can answer the questions how he wishes.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The budget task has not changed from the document that was given to the Opposition last year involving the three-year program that I have been asked to complete. I was addressing the fluctuations in this. Enrolment benchmarks is one where, when that program was brought in by the Federal Government, we made some estimates of the number of students who might be coming back into our school system and the demands that might have on our school system. The honourable member will notice that in 1999-2000 there is an allocation of \$7.9 million for that task. For 1998-99 we estimated \$5.2 million and the actual turned out to be \$3.1 million. This is just a case where we have fluctuating figures.

We have estimated \$6.1 million this year, given that we now have a firmer feel on figures in terms of the number of students coming back into the system. In our initial program we listed \$7.9 million. This is an exact example of where these figures fluctuate from time to time, but the basic savings target given to us by the Treasurer is \$39.3 million that I had to deliver for this year. It rises to \$47 million next year, and that task has not been changed by the Treasurer whatsoever.

**Ms WHITE:** Indeed, the Government savings task has not been changed by the Treasurer, but the Minister is avoiding telling us what is the total budget task. In this document it is a figure of \$62.8 million. I believe that the Minister is looking at the same document as I am. He has picked out one of those additional costs and explained a difference in those figures. If we add them all up, what is the Minister's figure? If the Minister's total budget task is not \$62.8 million, what is it now? I have leaked documents that say it is now \$72.8 million.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** There are fluctuating figures within this. I looked again at the year 2000 compliance and our estimated costs there. These figures were put down last year as an estimate for the next three years. The bottom line figure in terms of our savings to Treasury, as I have stated over and over again, was \$29.8 million last year, \$39.3 million this year and \$47 million next year. They are the figures with which we have to comply with Treasury to achieve the budget task put down by the Treasurer.

**Mrs PENFOLD:** I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 2, pages 8 and 9, output 2.1. Will the Minister advise how many child-care services were considered to be at risk or assisted by the Premier's \$1 million child-care fund?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Members would be well aware of the changes in child-care payments to parents made by the Federal Government last year. As a result of that it was obvious that a number of child-care centres would require either restructuring or may well have had to be closed. As a result of that, the Premier instigated a \$1 million Premier's fund to assist those children's services, child-care services and out of hours school care services to enable them to restructure and ensure that they continue. One of the provisos with their receiving money from the Premier's fund was that they could show that they would be viable in the longer term.

As of 31 May, 62 services have been assisted. Of those there were 48 child-care centres; 14 out of school hours centres; and 15 country centres. Approximately \$562 000 went to child-care centres, and \$100 000 went to out of school hours care—a total of \$662 000. I am aware of a further tranche of requests and approvals currently waiting for me. In addition, we have opened this up to the private

child-care sector, allowing it to also apply to the Premier's fund, recognising that it was also experiencing difficulties because of the changed payments being made via the Federal Government. Some in the private child-care sector have taken up that offer and made application as well. New grants will be announced this month, and I am about to sign off on that. That will bring the total of grants to \$877 000 from the Premier's fund.

**Mrs PENFOLD:** I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 2. Will the Minister advise what is the level of operating grants for kindergartens this year and how it compares with previous years? Has the Government kept its promise to increase the grants?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I have a close knowledge of kindergartens, having a son just working his way through his last term before starting primary school next term. It is particularly pertinent to me. He is an energetic young fellow, so I am sure his teachers will enjoy him in their class. The Government's election commitment was to increase by 33 per cent the operating grants to kindergartens. As of January 1999 an increase of 16 per cent was paid to all kindergartens in that operating grant, and the next increase of 17 per cent is to be paid in January 2000. This increases the amount paid by the Government from \$604 000 in 1997-98 to \$800 000 in the year 2000, and the average size centre will receive an operating grant of approximately \$2 500.

The actual grant is designed to cover such things as electricity, water and cleaning costs incurred by the kindergartens to ensure that they can operate at a satisfactory level. That 33 per cent increase has been well greeted by kindergarten directors who recognise that the Government is putting in additional money to help them overcome those operating costs. As I move around the State and look at a number of kindergartens I see dedicated staff who are operating under very good conditions, and I see some very lively young people within those kindergartens who will be excellent South Australians as they move along.

I also see the parents and the commitment that those parents have towards the education of their young children. A lot of fundraising goes on in our kindergartens, and I put on record my thanks to the parents involved in that fundraising because it helps the Government no end in terms of providing additional resources and facilities within our kindergartens. A significant amount of money is raised by parents. I thank them for their enthusiasm and for the money they raise in our kindergartens.

**Mrs PENFOLD:** I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 2. Will the Minister advise what the Government is doing to meet the child-care needs of families in rural areas?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Our rural families and their child-care requirements are quite special. Unlike the metropolitan area where within a couple of blocks or certainly within five or 10 minutes travel one can access a kindergarten or child-care centre, unfortunately in the country, due to distance, the viability of child-care centres, particularly private child-care centres, is something quite different from that in the metropolitan area, and there are special needs and special requirements to ensure that people get an adequate child-care strategy.

The State and Commonwealth Governments continue to maintain the commitment under the national child-care strategy agreement to establish child-care places in approved high needs areas. To date the following places have been allocated to areas of high need in rural areas: centre based long day care, 371; family day care 2 948; outside school

hours care 1 011; after school care and before school care, 487; and vacation care, 955. There are eight centre-based care projects in active stages from planning to near completion in the following country areas: Mount Gambier, 5 places; extension to child care at Murray Bridge, 21 places (a Commonwealth involved project); Nuriootpa, 5 places (an extension to integrated children's services); Oak Valley, 16 places (integrated with school and primary school); Port Augusta, 21 places (a Commonwealth involved project); Renmark, 21 places (an extension to the preschool at Renmark); and Two Wells, 21 places (a new child-care centre with a preschool that will be developed at Two Wells over the next 12 months—we are currently in negotiations with a local landowner to purchase a parcel of land and will then be able to go to tender for the building of that facility). In Waikerie, there will be 21 new child-care places following the establishment of a child-care centre and a preschool. Extensions have been made to the Bordertown centre (five places) and there is a new integrated facility at Clare (31 places). These projects were completed in the first and second terms of 1999.

The centre at Clare is now located directly across the road from the high school. Some degree of concern was expressed by parents in Clare about the shifting of their kindergarten or preschool, but I am pleased to report that I have spoken with about half a dozen parents and they are absolutely ecstatic about the quality of the centre and its location. Not one word has been uttered against the centre in Clare, and parents are very enthusiastic about it. During the past year, 126 family day care places have been allocated to rural schemes, and of those 19 have been dedicated to Aboriginal specific schemes.

Family day care in the country plays an important role because, as I have said, private child-care providers tend not to establish centres in the country. I can understand that because of the distance involved and in terms of viability, but this leaves parents in the country with a gap to fill. Particularly now when farmers and their wives or partners are often spending time on tractors during seeding and harvesting, they need access to child care so that they can help to run their farm.

It is particularly pleasing that a number of people have taken up family day care in the country. If it were not for family day care, I am not sure where country people could turn to obtain child care for their children. So, an extremely good scheme is operating in the country. Of course, this scheme also operates in the metropolitan area, but it is particularly good for country people.

**Ms WHITE:** Last year, the cut by Treasury to education was \$29.8 million, but the total budget task for the department was much larger—\$48 million, as revealed in last year's Estimates. That additional budget task was made up of \$9.6 million of unavoidable cost pressures and \$9.2 million of unfunded Government initiatives. To make up the shortfall, a whole raft of cuts to education were listed, including such things as shortening the school year by a week, cutting adult re-entry, closing schools, getting rid of 100 teachers, rationalising bus services and so on. The total, which has been confirmed by the Minister, was \$49.9 million.

The Opposition agrees that the cut by Treasury to education is \$39.3 million. What it does not agree on is the true size of the total budget task. In this leaked document of last year (which the Minister has confirmed), that task was listed as \$62.8 million and comprised \$10.6 million of unavoidable cost pressures and \$12.9 million of unfunded Government initiatives.

I will read to the Committee the figures listed in this document of last year and I ask the Minister to confirm whether those figures are the same. I want to know what the figures are for this year. According to this document, the cost of the Year 2000 compliance project is \$1.5 million; reduction in liabilities of workers' compensation, \$1 million; State Government efficiency dividend, \$6.6 million; indigenous education strategic initiatives program, \$800 000; and leave loading increase, \$700 000.

The Minister has just confirmed that the EBA calculation is \$6.1 million and not \$7.9 million as stated in this document—and I accept that. The provision for implementation of other policy initiatives is \$1 million; on-line delivery of vocational education, \$3.5 million; and non-government interest scheme, \$500 000; plus the cut from Treasury of \$39.3 million. Are those figures I have just read valid or have they changed? Information from leaked documents is that there is an extra \$10 million, bringing the total budget task to \$72.8 million.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I am not sure how many times I have to say this, but I will keep on saying it until the honourable member listens.

*Ms White interjecting:*

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order! The Minister has the floor.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The honourable member has correctly read the figures in that document but, as I indicated earlier, those figures are subject to variation purely because they are an estimate. Year 2000 compliance must be dealt with in terms of where we are now located and how much it is costing. I will ask Mr Bronte Treloar, the department's financial expert, to give the member an explanation of those figures.

**Mr Treloar:** Those figures were structured 18 months ago as part of a three year budget plan for the department. As mentioned earlier, some of those figures will change simply because of the rate of expenditure in 1998-99. When the financial year ends, we then look at the carry-over situation and structure the budget for the 1999-2000 financial year. For example, we look at what amounts have been paid and what goes through prior to the end of the financial year and then work out the carry-over figure for, say, Year 2000 compliance. Broadly speaking, this plan stands, but it needs to be modified for such things as the carry-over.

**Ms WHITE:** Last year, the department came up with a three year plan with bottom line figures for the total budget task. Those figures are stated in black and white, and the Minister has confirmed the authenticity of this document. Yet, you are now refusing to confirm whether that figure of \$62.8 million stands or whether, in accordance with my information and the document which has been leaked to the Opposition, the figure is now \$72.8 million.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I will ask Mr Treloar to continue his explanation.

**Mr Treloar:** A number of the figures contained in this document have changed. I mentioned Year 2000 compliance—that figure is likely to be higher because of the carry-over. The reduction in liabilities of workers' compensation will be of about that order.

In terms of understanding the document and the description of the total budget task, we must recognise that, as has been clearly indicated, it includes Treasury savings requirements and also the significant reallocation of resources which are decided in any given year. For example, it was planned to spend in 1998-99 \$3.5 million on the on-line delivery of vocational education. It is my understanding—and this will

need to be checked—that that amount has not been spent in total. The plans are there, and there will certainly be a carry-over amount in that area. The point I emphasise is that these are decisions about the reallocation of resources into, for example, an investment in on-line delivery, and that decision then goes toward making up the so-called total budget task.

It is a mixture of savings requirements. Quite specifically, if we look at another one—the enrolment benchmark adjustment, as we said before—we see that the numbers have changed. In terms of a budget plan, dealing with the amounts for 1998-99 about which we talked earlier, instead of there being \$5.2 million there was \$3.1 million. Instead of there being a plan for \$7.9 million, the plan now involves \$6.1 million. Those figures can still change on the basis of what the actual enrolments are. It is a very fluid situation. The rate at which we spend on on-line delivery can be a matter for decision by the Minister and within the department. Again, I cannot over emphasise the fact that the document is a fluid document. It is a budget strategy which was constructed 18 months ago and one that is modified quite frequently. Unavoidable cost pressures arise and other decisions are made with respect to the reallocation of resources, and those decisions are being made in an ongoing way.

In relation to other policy initiatives, again an allowance of \$1 million has been made, and that is broadly in line with the level of expenditure we would expect in 1999-2000 for that purpose.

**Ms WHITE:** Hold on here. You have drawn up a three year strategy, which has definite figures for a total budget task last year, and on that basis you have made tangible cuts to education. You have got rid of 100 teachers. You are intending to close 30 schools. You are cutting the school year by a week to save money. These are the tangible cuts that are also listed in this document. You cannot now say that these are figures that change. Yes, they do change, but you know what they are because you have designed the things that you were cutting. The Minister in his opening statement said that there would be no further cuts to these items. However, you are saying to me now that you do not know whether or not this \$62.8 million figure is correct. Is that what you are saying to me? I have internal documents from your department showing that you know exactly that that has blown out by \$10 million, that it is now \$72.8 million; and, correspondingly, that money has to be made up in either cuts or cash reserves or by some other method. You cannot just sit there and say that you do not know what is in your own budget strategy: of course you do. Tell us Minister.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** What is set down there is a plan over three years. The member for Taylor is suggesting that those figures should be set in concrete and that they should not be changed.

*Ms White interjecting:*

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order!

*Ms White interjecting:*

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order!

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I have news for the honourable member, Sir: things do change. She talks about—

*Ms White interjecting:*

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order! The member for Taylor is out of order.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The member for Taylor would indicate that this Government is the only one that has closed schools or the only one that has sacked teachers. I remind her that the former Labor Government closed over 70 schools prior to any school closures being undertaken by this

Government. I remind her that the Hon. Greg Crafter sacked 800—not 100—teachers in 1991 because of cuts that were required in the budget at that stage. I remind her that this is not yet the end of the 1998-99 year and that at the end of that year, as Mr Treloar has said, we will be looking at the figures in terms of reallocation in the budget. These are estimates of what we, on our best estimate, have expected to be the sort of pressures on our budget.

However, I come back again to the fact that the savings task given to me by the Treasurer has not changed. Last year it was \$29.8 million; this year it is \$39.3 million. That has not changed. Within our department we get changes all the time as different cost pressures arise. I will give an example of a very small one involving air-conditioning on buses. Last year in October an issue arose as to whether we should be having air-conditioned buses in our school system. I undertook then to run a trial of three air-conditioned buses in the State to see what outcome that would deliver for students. That was a cost pressure that arose which we had to meet. Similar issues arise involving increased costs.

There are others, for example, the EBA, where we allocated \$7.9 million this year and we estimate that it will now be \$6.1 million. So, you have rises and falls all the time. The point is that, as Mr Treloar has said, this is a fluid document. We may set out a three year plan—how to come up with the savings required by the Treasurer and what the cost pressures would be on the department—but, as I said, we are not yet to the end of 1998-99, so we cannot give the exact figures for this financial year. We will know that after 30 June and will then be making reallocations, and it will be in the annual report. Mr Spring might like to further elaborate.

**Mr Spring:** I have been managing budgets in four States and Territories. It is the same every year, as the Minister has described. You have to manage a budget and some of the votes in a \$1.5 million budget can alter by several million either way. So, from month to month you are always in a situation of looking at how the cash flows are going and doing reallocations. We are at the situation now where all the accounts are not in for the end of the financial year. Some of these will depend on completion dates for large capital projects. It is simply not feasible at this point in time and on this particular day to say how that budget stacks up, because we will not know that until we receive the 30 June accounts. Certainly, it is not feasible, as the Minister has indicated, to hold to a plan made 18 months beforehand.

Estimates are an indication, but they are just that: they are estimates, and there are proper processes for seeking approval of reallocations through which we go. It is not an uncommon exercise. The last thing that I think anyone would want us to do in dealing with public money is spend up to the amount we have set if we did not need to spend it, or not to pay our bills. Some of these areas such as long service leave and WorkCover include large amounts of money and depend on factors outside our control. For instance, long service leave relates to individual aspirations at particular times and sick leave relates to things such as epidemics of influenza. We are constantly in a situation of having to manage within a budget: that is the situation now, and it is not different anywhere else.

**Ms WHITE:** We have in front of us proposed savings of \$65 million for this year and we will go through every line and find out where the cuts—

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order! The time for the honourable member's questions has expired. I remind the Committee that

mobile telephones are to be turned off. The member for Fisher.

**The Hon. R.B. SUCH:** Will the Minister provide an update in respect of the Netherby Kindergarten in terms of possible relocation?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** This issue has generated a lot of community debate. In terms of answering letters to members of the community it is right up there with the country areas program. There is a particular issue involved here. The current site of the Netherby Kindergarten (or the site where it has been for the past 39 years) is on Waite arboretum land. An old army transport hut from the Second World War was handed over and the kindergarten began in that hut and has continued.

Obviously it has now outlived its time and is in need of replacement, and so it was a matter of where that replacement would occur. I have looked at the original site on the arboretum land at the Waite Institute, and a number of other sites have also been looked at. A possible alternative site on Waite Road alongside the child-care centre was one of the options looked at. The cost for that site is about \$745 000. The Mitcham Council has advised that it would be very pleased if I looked at a site other than the Waite arboretum land, so we will be sending it plans in the near future. The capital cost carry-over from the 1998-99 budget is \$526 000 for this development.

The University of Adelaide has been very supportive of whatever decision I make, whether it be on the original site or whether it be at another site. The kindergarten is currently located at Unley High School, which is not an ideal location for young children, so I will be making a decision in the very near future on where this will be located. The University of Adelaide has been extremely good to work with in providing land at a peppercorn rental for the site that we choose, and has even offered landscaping to the department to enhance the site.

The problem with the current site is a number of sugar gums that are located on the site and the danger of sugar gum limbs falling on young children; and the local residents are very keen to maintain those sugar gums. The redevelopment would involve the removal of eight trees which run along the fence line of Claremont Avenue. I undertook to get reports from people involved in the industry on whether we might be able to prune those trees rather than take them out, and also on what structural damage might be done to those trees in the new development with respect to laying foundations, the disturbance to the tree roots and that sort of thing. The indication is that the trees may not recover, were we to build on the original site, even if we pruned them, because of the disturbance to roots, so obviously that is a factor that will play in my decision making.

**The Hon. R.B. SUCH:** My second question also relates to the kindergarten. What are the implications for nearby kindergartens, some of which may now be under utilised?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** A number of kindergartens are within a 5 kilometre radius of the old site of the Netherby Kindergarten, at Mitcham and Mitcham Village and the other side of Cross Road. We will review that situation next year. Some of those preschool facilities may need to be rationalised. I noted one in particular that is severely under utilised, but we will look at the enrolment patterns for next year. By the end of terms three and four this year we will know more about what enrolments will be coming through the gate next year, and we will then be able to ascertain what sort of capacity those facilities will maintain. Also, the district

officer is maintaining very close communication with all the services, and that review will be carried out with full community consultation and within the current departmental guidelines.

**The Hon. R.B. SUCH:** I am happy for the Minister to take on notice my third question, on the Aberfoyle Park Kindergarten on Sunnymead Drive. Will the Minister provide information about the relocation of that kindergarten to the campus schools at Aberfoyle Park? I would have expected this relocation to be complete by now, but obviously there has been some hold up. Will the Minister provide an update on when that new facility is likely to be available on the campus schools?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The current site of the kindergarten to which the honourable member refers is under high transmission power lines. The department and community have agreed that it would be beneficial if that kindergarten were relocated. We agreed to that, and the school that the honourable member has indicated is the one to which it was agreed would be relocated. I do not have the exact details he seeks at the moment, so I will take the balance of that question on notice and get an answer as to what is happening with those plans and when the relocation is likely to occur.

**Ms WHITE:** The Minister is the senior Minister representing the Treasurer in the Lower House. In this budget we have seen an increase in Government spending by nearly \$450 million, yet education is being cut over this three year period to a very large extent, particularly TAFE, by closing schools, cutting teachers and all the rest of it. When talking about ETSA the Minister stated in Parliament that once ETSA was sold he would spend all this money on education. I remind him of what he said on 24 February last year. He said that with the money freed up in interest rate payments made on State debt he would be able to employ an extra 40 teachers per day, employ an extra 70 school support officers every day, air condition every school and preschool in the State within 40 days of the sale, provide 170 state of the art child-care places every day, build a new TAFE campus every week, eliminate the current school maintenance backlog in one month, provide 1 000 computers for every student every day and build three or four special education units every day.

The ETSA lease is no longer hypothetical and the Minister has indicated, perhaps in a frivolous way, that with ETSA proceeds he would spend more on education. Is the Minister going ahead with the cuts to education to this level? What are the Minister's priorities? His budget this year has increased in outlays by \$450 million, yet education is being cut by this much. Why?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The list of examples that the honourable member has given was purely that. If she reads *Hansard* she will find that I stated that if we received an additional \$2 million a day these are some of the programs that could be undertaken. I was making an example of what you could do with \$2 million a day. As the honourable member said, I may have said that with a certain amount of frivolousness, but my point was to highlight how much you could do with \$2 million a day. The question was: if we sold ETSA tomorrow, released our State debt and no longer had to pay \$750 million a year in interest as from tomorrow, and if all the money went to education (which obviously it would not), just what exactly could you do? If I remember, the question asked of me was: if I had an extra \$2 million a day, what could I do with it? It was a matter of giving some examples of what could be done with an additional \$2 million a day going into education and highlighting the magnitude of



that amount of money and exactly what it could do. We have actually increased education spending this year in this budget by \$14 million. It is up from 1998-99. Our budget this year is \$1.66 billion. We are committed to getting the very best education we can for our young children. Further, I indicate that, Dr Jan Keightley, the CEO of SSABSA, is here and is available for questioning.

**Ms WHITE:** We have not concluded our questioning on child care.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I pointed out at the start of this program that the member for Taylor has not undertaken any questions on child care whatsoever. She has decided to go down a track on budget issues and the budget—and that is her decision. Child care questioning was open—

**Ms WHITE:** I have a point of order, Sir. The Minister and I do not have an agreed timetable. I put that to him in writing. I sent him a letter on Friday. He said he received that notification on Monday. I complained about the timetable and I do not agree to it. It is not within his purview to cut off the Opposition's line of questioning.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The timetable is in the hands of the Committee and the Committee will decide when the change-over occurs. Can I suggest that at the end of the line of questioning we will have the changeover?

**Ms WHITE:** We will indicate.

**The CHAIRMAN:** But there is a bit of flow-over from the borders anyway, so I would suggest that we will change over shortly.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I just wish to indicate that I have organised officers to be here during the day at specific times. They have better things to do than to be hanging around here all day. We set down a program so that they could come in, be questioned on different areas of the budget and then be able to go back to do their normal work rather than having to wait around here wondering whether or not a question was to be asked of them. That is the reason for putting down a specific time frame.

**Ms WHITE:** I have a point of order, Sir. As I said, I gave the Minister written notice that I would be asking questions. In fact, I gave him written notice on Friday. I accept that he says that his office says it did not receive my written notice until Monday. However, that is a day's notice that I would be asking other questions.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The decision is a decision of this Committee. I suggest that we try to keep to the timetable, otherwise at the end of the day whole lines could be missed out. I suggest that the staff changes be made but that you continue your line of questioning.

**Ms WHITE:** We do have child care questions.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We have not yet heard them. Can you ask those questions now so that we can change?

**Ms WHITE:** We will do that.

**Ms RANKINE:** Very recently the Federal Minister, Warren Truss, was in Adelaide. He made the statement that the Federal Government funding changes to child care since 1996 had had a positive, rather than a negative, effect. This is at odds with both the Minister's statement and those of the Premier last year who said that several centres had to close and hundreds of child-care workers had lost their jobs as a result of Federal funding changes. The receiver who closed down the Valley View and Salisbury East Child-Care Centres a fortnight ago—and they had operated for over 20 years in those areas—said that the blame lay firmly on Federal funding changes. In the case of South Australia, do you

support your Federal counterpart's claim that those funding changes have had a positive effect?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The result of the change in Federal funding allocations to child-care centres, undoubtedly, put pressure on a number of centres. One of the major factors, of course, in the operations of those centres has been the cost of formal child care. That has seen a reduction in demand for child care and so it is certainly a matter that had an effect on the number of children accessing child-care centres. The Premier recognised the pressure that was being placed on child-care centres and that is the reason why he suggested that we allocate a fund of some \$1 million to try to alleviate some of the pressure and also to enable restructuring to occur within the child-care centres to align to the new Federal Government policy.

As I said earlier, that \$1 million has been used extremely well. We have not quite used it all yet, but the centres that have accessed that have proved their viability in the long term. A number of centres have received over \$20 000 in support from that scheme: some centres within the electorates of the members for Wright and Taylor have received support from that fund. The State Government recognised that the changes that occurred as a result of the Federal Government policy change needed to be addressed by the State Government to ease some of the pressure that was on those centres.

**Ms RANKINE:** Can the Minister advise which child-care centres have closed or have been forced to amalgamate in the past 12 months?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** A total of 13 centres have closed since May 1996 as follows: Cowandilla, the Yugoslav Centre, The Parks, Direk, Valley View Day Nursery, Davoren Park, North Adelaide Baptist, Murray Institute of TAFE, Bumblebee, Munno Para, Pennington, Croydon TAFE and Enfield. I am advised that the Murray Institute of TAFE, Bumblebee, Munno Para, Pennington, Croydon and Enfield have closed within the past 12 months, but we will double check that.

#### Membership:

Mr Hill substituted for Mrs Geraghty.

**Ms RANKINE:** The Portfolio Statements, page 8.31, shows that preschool education has suffered a cut in nominal terms of just over \$700 000 from what was spent on preschool education last year. What is the reason for the cut and how does this sit with the Government's stated focus on the early years?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The funds that go to preschools and also, of course, to primary schools or any of our school structure are related to the number of students moving through. We have a formula for teacher allocation and those allocations change depending upon the number of students going through. Currently, we are seeing a downturn in primary school numbers because of a hump that has gone through there. That hump is now moving into the secondary school sector, so I expect over the next couple of years we will have increased allocations to secondary schools and decreased allocations to primary schools, purely because of the numbers and the teacher and SSO formulas which apply in the department and which were set and agreed to with the union. We offer some 418 preschools, 179 of which are in country areas. The current level of projected preschool enrolments for term 2 in 1999 is 18 608 eligible children; the projected term 2 attendance is 15 959. That gives an indication as to the fluctuations.

Statewide staffing is 796.65 full-time equivalents. The preschools receive State funding worth approximately \$42.2 million, which is inclusive of departmental preschools, grant funded preschools, early year strategy and enterprise agreement funding. As I say, the fluctuations that occur are more than likely due to the change in numbers in preschools rather than any budget cuts.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I remind members that they can ask any questions they like on any line, but if they wish to take advantage of the Minister's staff at the table I suggest that they try to observe an approximate timetable.

**Mr CONDOUS:** Which Children's Services capital projects are due for completion?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Some 14 projects in the country and six in the metropolitan area are due for completion at a cost of \$6.681 million. The major works for Children's Services for the year 1999-2000 are as follows: the Aberfoyle Hub Child-care Centre, \$318 000; Bordertown Child-care Centre, \$82 000; Clare Child-care Centre and Clare Preschool, \$1 024 000; Cleve Preschool, \$500 000; Kent Town Preschool, \$700 000; Nuriootpa Child-care Centre, \$75 000; Oak Valley Child-care Centre, \$240 000; Renmark Child-care Centre, \$481 000; The Levels Campus Child-care Centre, \$317 000; Netherby Preschool, \$526 000 (as I mentioned earlier, that is a carry-over figure: the figure now is \$745 000); Two Wells Preschool, \$302 000; Two Wells Child-care Centre, \$315 000; Waikerie Child-care Centre, \$315 000; Warradale Child-care Centre, \$191 000; Willunga Preschool, \$250 000; and Woodville Gardens Preschool, \$620 000. That totals in excess of \$6 million.

I also know that minor works projects have taken place to relocate the following preschool sites: the Coonalpyn Kindergarten, \$95 000; Lock District RSL and Memorial Kindergarten, \$150 000; Minnipa Play Centre, \$30 000; and Saddleworth Early Learning Centre, \$150 000. That totals some \$425 000.

**Mr CONDOUS:** Are potential employers in child-care centres subject to police checks? If so, what is the price per check, and who pays that amount?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** This is a particularly important area. There have been ongoing discussions among States about the transfer of material on those people who either are paedophiles or have a history of violence against children, with information on anyone convicted of those particular crimes. It is an area on which we have ongoing discussions, and it is currently before the national Attorney-General's meeting of Ministers. We in South Australia have agreed that we will transfer information which aligns to those who have been convicted of a crime, but we have not yet agreed to transfer information on those who are under suspicion or who are suspected to have committed a crime. Police checks on any staff who are to be employed in a child-care centre are particularly important.

Those regulations came into effect on 3 April. They incorporate police checks for licensees, for managers of child-care centres and for child contact staff. The introduction of police checks will ensure that individuals with a significant offender history of violence against children will not hold a licence or be employed in a child-care centre. The department conducts and also pays for the police check on the licensee and the manager. The licensee, as the employer, conducts police checks on staff. That cost is borne by the employer or the employee. The cost of a police check is \$38.75. The introduction of this has certainly been welcomed by the child-care industry and reinforces the need to protect our young

children from anyone who either may have committed a crime or has a history of the same.

**Mr CONDOUS:** What kinds of support are provided to children aged four years and under through the successful Early Years strategy?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Again, this question is particularly pertinent to me at this time with my children being the age they are. The Government has recognised the involvement of parents in children's upbringing, particularly in their development.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Hear, hear!

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I agree. Some very successful programs have focused on parents of children four years of age and under. In fact, we have had both national and international recognition for our Early Years initiatives. *Growing and Learning in a Family* is one document which has been produced, which I have read through and which is particularly helpful for parents in noting at what stage of development their child is or what could be expected at that particular age. It is an excellent document. The Government allocated \$100 000 to enable a series of parent workshops to be held across the State to implement that document. The feedback that I have had from parents on that matter, particularly in our local area, has been excellent. There have been a number of distributions involving that document, and people and parents have asked for further copies for their relations, for example, who might baby-sit their children.

Eclipse is also an early childhood literacy resource promoting a partnership between parents, teachers and carers in promoting young children's literacy. This is also a very successful program. We will undertake an evaluation of those two programs, and it will be conducted by the University of South Australia. Another is the First Start program, which emphasises literacy development in the early years in the home. It was a Liberal Government that funded this innovation in the 1994-95 budget. It was first developed in the Playford and Salisbury Council areas and now operates successfully in Hackham West, Taperoo and Port Pirie.

An early learning adviser is now based in Ceduna to expand the program to the West Coast. It is particularly important for parents in terms of their role in developing young children—something of which I as a parent am conscious when having conversations with my young children—to ensure that they develop their language skills as well as they possibly can so that when those children do come into either preschool or primary school they do not have a literacy problem and can communicate well. It is a responsibility of all parents to ensure that they spend time on their young children and develop them as best they can. The *Growing and Learning in a Family* document, in particular, is a specific and very good aid to parents with young children in terms of developing that literacy in their early years.

**Ms WHITE:** We are seeing significant shifts in the child-care industry in South Australia as day-care centres continue to close and many centres struggle to keep their doors open in the wake of the massive cuts to child-care funding by the Federal Government. Indeed, the Premier told Parliament last June that, since the Federal Government withdrew operational subsidies to community-based centres, 14 South Australian centres had at that time closed or been forced to amalgamate and that over 200 child-care workers had been put out of work, representing more than 10 per cent of the total child-care industry work force.

During the past 12 months we have seen more centres close over and above the 18 centres that the Minister listed

in the Estimates last year as having been forced either to close or to amalgamate with other centres. A fortnight ago two private centres closed. The Government has acknowledged that there is a shift to more informal forms of child care. Despite the Opposition's warnings in June last year that private centres, along with community-based centres, were struggling the Minister has continued to refuse private centres access to the \$600 000 that was available until April this year for struggling centres, and this was too late for at least two private child-care centres in South Australia which have recently closed.

I wish to ask the Minister a question about the regulations he gazetted in April this year. At the same time the Minister regulated the long day care industry through the regulations that came into force at the beginning of April this year, he has continued to turn a blind eye to other forms of care. His excuse has been that he will take a look at the industry more broadly as he reviews the legislation. It is a poor excuse, but it is a political solution.

I want to concentrate on one important concern as regards child-care, that is, the safety of children, and give one example of the problem that has been generated by the Minister turning a blind eye to sections of the industry and, instead, going for the political solution of tightening regulations only on that section of the industry already regulated. Under the new child-care regulations governing child-care centres only and not other forms of care, regulation 29 provides that there must be a ratio of one adult to every four children under school age on excursions, that is, whenever the children leave the centre and either use transport or cross main roads.

When we debated the changes to the family day care provisions in the Children's Services Act in March last year I raised with the Minister the problem that there was no monitoring of how family day carers handled excursions. I particularly raised with him the issue of children being transported in cars with not enough seat belts and that sort of thing. The Minister told me at that time that he would look into it, but 12 months down the track we have the situation where family day carers need only one adult to control seven children under school age when on excursions.

Sections of the long day care industry have told me that the cost of employing additional staff to meet their one adult to every four children ratio means that they are cutting down on excursions. I do not know the extent of the validity of that argument that staffing costs are the bulk of a centre's costs, but I do assert that children's safety comes first. How can the Minister justify standards that are half as stringent for one section of the industry as regards children's safety when they are being transported to excursions, crossing roads and that sort of thing, and why has he failed to address this problem when I raised it with him over 12 months ago?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckley:** Obviously I do not have access to private child-care centres' budgets in terms of whether or not they are cutting down on excursions or exactly what is going on. So, like the member for Taylor, I cannot confirm whether the allegations that are being made are correct or incorrect. The honourable member raised the ratio of one to seven for family day care as against the one to four for private child-care or long day care providers. The national standards for family day care providers were approved at a Ministers' conference in June 1998. All the national standards for family day care providers in South Australia were implemented during 1998, so we complied with the standards that were set nationally and agreed to by all Ministers. Family

day care providers who have demonstrated that they have exceptional circumstances and cannot meet those standards have been granted an extension of time to comply with the new standards. Over 95 per cent of family day care providers now meet those standards.

As I said, the national standards were approved at the Ministers' conference in June 1998, and all coordination unit standards are being implemented in South Australia during 1999. I am advised that South Australia leads the way in terms of family day care when compared to the rest of Australia and that the standards that we require, particularly in terms of the inspections that are undertaken by departmental officers, are maintained and adhered to and are working well. The recent Earnst and Young report on family day care is very complimentary as regards the standards and the management of that care, and the parents' views substantiate that outcome.

**Mr HILL:** I would like to ask the Minister about an issue that has been brought to my attention by a child-care centre in my electorate. I will not name the centre but will give the Minister the details later, because if I mention the name of the centre and the anecdote that might tend to identify the parents. The centre advised me that it has a problem with funding in relation to a particular type of client. This is but one example, but I gather there are others. In this case the client is a woman whose husband works but is on a very low income and she does not work and is at home, so she is not entitled to funding for care so that she can work. She has two children, both of whom have attention deficit disorder (ADD), one at primary school and the other at home. The child at home has a huge behavioural problem and, as a result, the mother is not coping and has health problems.

On the advice of her doctor, the mother placed the child in child care. The cost of a week of child care for her, even with a maximum subsidy, is about \$56. I gather that there is a fund available to pay for child care for 13 weeks for people who are in financial difficulty, and that is what happened in the first instance. She accessed it, things were going reasonably well, the family was able to settle down and she was able to manage the problem better—and then the 13 weeks ended. I think the centre's director can approve the first 13 weeks and that a second lot can be approved by the department.

In this case 13 weeks of child care was provided; then because funding was not in place for the second 13 weeks the child went home for a couple of weeks and the learning that had occurred in the first 13 weeks in terms of behaviour modification and management dissolved and the child returned to where it was before. The child eventually returned to the child-care centre for a second 13 week period, and with FAYS, I think, and other agencies the centre worked with that child and the parents to help the family.

The stop-gap nature of this funding has caused a major social welfare problem for that family. It would be very sensible for funding to be put in place to ensure that attention was given for a prolonged period of time, without breaking after 13 weeks and not knowing what will happen after the second 13 weeks. As the child-care centre pointed out to me, if you do not fix up this child's problems now it will eventually go into primary and then secondary school and these problems may amplify and the costs to society will be much greater. It seems sensible to work to fix them where they occur rather than to have this stop-gap approach. I know that this is an unusual circumstance and probably does not happen all that often. I know that the child-care centre has been working on this for some time and has become very frustrat-

ed. If you know anything about it, Minister, can you tell me how you can fix it, and if you do not know anything about it will you undertake to look at it and fix it?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The issue highlighted by the member for Kaurna is a Commonwealth responsibility. It is an issue of special benefit for children in that situation. I am quite happy, if he supplies me with the details, to take it up with the Federal Minister, Warren Truss, to see what we can do in that case.

**Ms WHITE:** Has the Minister previously announced cuts that he will no longer go ahead with? We have just passed the ETSA legislation. Are there any previously announced cuts that the Minister will no longer go ahead with and, if so, which are they? I refer to the document leaked to the Opposition last year that enumerated many of those cuts.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The tender documents have not even been drawn up for the lease at this stage. While we have been given a range of figures as to what we might expect from a lease of ETSA, there are no guarantees at the moment as the marketplace has not been tested. Until we find out exactly what level of lease payment the Government is likely to receive, the three year strategy put into place will remain. When we have more information in terms of a tender and what the price is likely to be, I assume that the Government will reassess its options in regarding its budget strategy. Until we do that we have no guarantees. It is purely hypothetical as to what level of remuneration we might receive for a lease of ETSA, and the program set down will be maintained until such time as the lease is signed and the Government looks at what further moneys it might have.

**Ms WHITE:** The Minister stated publicly that the difference between the total Government savings task of \$39.3 million and the total budget task of \$62.8 million will be made up from cash reserves, that is, \$23 million of cash reserves. In light of that, and given that we have a list of \$65 million worth of proposed savings strategies (and the Minister has confirmed various of them previously), which of them will now not go ahead but be made up from cash reserves? Alternatively, is the Minister telling us that all the proposed savings will go ahead in the way outlined in this document?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Last year, as members would recall, we indicated in the budget that there would be a certain level of savings in 1998-99 from school closures and amalgamations. Because of my agreement not to move on that until the legislation had been passed by the Parliament, apart from those schools which parents deemed they wished to close (of which there were a couple), the closures that would have occurred or schools not commenced in 1999 did not continue. Obviously, there will be a roll-over in terms of looking at the budget task in that area. The tasks set down are there to be obtained.

In terms of waiting until the Parliament had ratified the school closure amalgamation legislation, it meant that we used cash reserves and other measures to pick that up. The five school closures that occurred in 1998 were the Cooke Area School, a closure resulting from the withdrawal of railway operations to Port Augusta, leaving no parents with school children in the town; Nepabunna Aboriginal School, which was voluntarily closed in July 1998 with students now attending Leigh Creek area school; Kybybolite Primary School, which was closed in December 1998 voluntarily through enrolment decline and parents recognising that better educational outcomes could be obtained for their children; Marla Primary School, which was closed voluntarily in

December 1998 through enrolment decline; and Elizabeth Grove Junior Primary and Primary Schools amalgamated from the start of this year, and that was a voluntary closure also. By the end of 1999 I am aware that there will be three closures to date: Airdale Junior Primary and Primary Schools will amalgamate from the start of the year 2000 school year; Jamestown Primary and High Schools will consolidate on the high school site at the start of the year 2000, the estimated cost being \$2.75 million; and Elizabeth South Junior Primary and Primary Schools will amalgamate from the start of the year 2000 school year. That factor of not undertaking further school closures other than those that were voluntary has meant in the budget that we did not achieve what we expected in terms of savings in that area, and that will roll over into this year's budget and those schools that have either indicated that they will be closing this year or early next year.

**Ms WHITE:** There are several in the strategy; what about the rest?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** There are several items in the strategy. As has been said, this is a fluid document. There is slippage not only in capital works but also on planned savings. That slippage is estimated to be about \$6 million and principally through the following areas: the shorter school week; site rationalisation; delay in TAFE fee increases; devolution of utilities and TRTs; and the swimming program in which we indicated significant savings but not undertaken.

#### Membership:

Mrs Geraghty substituted for Mr Hill.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The member for Fisher earlier asked me about Aberfoyle Park Preschool and I have an answer for him. Construction will commence in term 3, in August this year, with completion expected in April next year. We are awaiting finalisation of land purchase and documentation is complete to go to tender. We should be moving on that one very quickly.

**The Hon. R.B. SUCH:** In terms of the general direction of education in this State, has any thought been given to looking at whether the terminology and nomenclature of institutions is still appropriate, for example 'high school', 'primary school', 'special school' and 'area school'? Is the department looking at whether the terminology is still accurate in light of changes and proposed changes in the system?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I cannot say that any specific thought has been given to changing the names of schools. Perhaps the honourable member is referring to the introduction of middle schools, such as Seaford-Hallett Cove, to which we now refer as an R-12 school. Such a suggestion could well emanate from the review of the Education Act and the Children's Services Act if it is believed that there is an argument for changing the nomenclature of schools.

**The Hon. R.B. SUCH:** Different States use different terminology. For example, the term 'special school', which is used in this State, is used in a different context in New South Wales, and that State has technology high schools. If there is a change in the partnership process, that might be an opportune time to look at whether terminology such as 'high school' is appropriate. I think this applies to all the other categories as well.

The next matter to which I refer has been a hobbyhorse of mine for a while. I applaud the announcement this morning about the vocational college at Christies Beach. Because of concerns expressed to me, I ask the Minister whether he is

confident that we will have enough technical teachers to teach electronics, etc., next year and beyond, given that I understand the average age of technical teachers is approaching retirement age and given the recent changes by the University of South Australia to the way in which those teachers will be trained.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I will ask Mr Spring to answer that question.

**Mr Spring:** At the national meeting of Ministers (MCEETYA) and at the instigation of South Australia, a task force (which I chair) was established to deal with national teacher recruitment issues. Recently, it was suggested that a similar group be set up to look at standards for teacher education. Those two matters have now been rolled together. Regarding the national teacher recruitment strategy, I think four States have a problem in this area. We are looking at the potential shortage of teachers, which will vary from State to State because some States have an excess and others a shortage.

In looking at this issue, we are trying to sharpen up our projections by using actual departmental projections, and we will report to Ministers later in the year. At the same time, we have commissioned the gathering of some marketing information about the sorts of people whom we might attract to these positions. When I started teaching, the subjects were woodwork, metalwork, technical drawing and, a bit later, welding. Today, schools are looking for hi-tech people and others who can teach across a range of technical areas.

As the honourable member would appreciate, we are not looking for the same sorts of people, but we are trying to sharpen up our understanding of the target industries from which we should seek to recruit these people. We expect to have done that within a few months. After that, we will look at designing ways to attract them to teaching. This will not be simple, because most of the sorts of people we want will be employed, although some may be unemployed. We will have to design ways to attract them, and to do that we will have to look at salaries and how we remunerate these people whilst they undergo teacher training.

There is a considerable amount of national and local interest in this matter. The report, which will cover shortages, where to find these people and how to convert them to teaching, will be available for Ministers in approximately October–November this year.

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

#### **Membership:**

Mr Scalzi substituted for Mrs Penfold.

**The Hon. R.B. SUCH:** This will be a parish pump one: it is a matter that I have taken up with the Minister by correspondence. It relates to the issue of Craighburn Primary School, which is an excellent school, as are all the schools in my electorate. As the Minister would know, it was built to accommodate 300 students but now it has something like 500 enrolled students. As local member I have had representation to see whether the department can address that issue of accommodation, given that I understand Hassells, the consultants, have prepared plans for extensions to the school. I just wonder whether the Minister is able to indicate any progress in relation to looking at that issue.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The south is an area where significant growth is occurring, and particularly in young families in that area. The Craighburn Primary School was

established in 1982 and it had solid accommodation for eight home bases. The enrolment growth, though, has necessitated the placement of additional relocatable classrooms on the site. As the member has suggested, the current enrolment is 510, forming 19 home based classes. I am advised that there are sufficient classrooms for all 19 home based classes at the moment. I am also advised that an additional solid block of four home bases, plus withdrawal teacher preparation and so on, was built in 1991–92 to give a total of 12 solid classrooms. A new dual relocatable classroom was delivered in October 1996. A further single, metal relocatable classroom was placed on site during term 2 1999, and this also includes withdrawal space to further support the school in the delivery of specialist programs.

The school submitted a minor maintenance works program request for an administration upgrade for 1998–99, but funding was not available. The project remains the school's number one priority for the 1999–2000 program, and currently it is the number one priority for the southern ranges district. The scope of that work also includes the enlargement of staffroom, administration and storage areas. Approval has been granted to engage a consultant to prepare a master site plan as this is a site which is quite steeply sloped and difficult in terms of identifying areas where you might put buildings and current earthworks that would have to be undertaken and the cost involved. I will be announcing the minor maintenance works program in July. So we will see at that stage whether the school has been successful in gaining funds for the projected works.

**Ms WHITE:** I refer to Budget Paper 3, page 51, which shows the list of cash and deposits as at 1 July 1998 as \$86.4 million and forecasts cash increasing to \$142.7 million. What is the reason for this increase? It is a significant increase in cash deposits. How did these reserves accumulate? In answering that the Minister might give some indication of the amount of cash nominally required to be kept on hand to meet ongoing expenses in terms of salaries and other accounts.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I will get Mr Treloar to answer that detailed question.

**Mr Treloar:** The level of cash held at any time fluctuates. There is not an exact answer as to what amount ought to be held for any particular purpose. I will perhaps give some indicative information. For example, in terms of just one part of the salaries component, funds held for PAYE transfers to the Australian Taxation Office at any given time would be of the order of at least \$8 million. So, we would need to hold cash for any of those transfers to the Australian Taxation Office for \$8 million. Cash balances are held on behalf of TAFE institutes and, quite clearly, that situation varies with the operations. That could be of the order of \$6 million to \$10 million.

In relation to the contingencies reserve that you may put aside in terms of the cash reserves, again there is not necessarily a right answer and it depends on a particular business. For example, you could look at, say, \$34 million being a contingency reserve representing, say, 2 per cent of the budget. Any business that runs within a 2 per cent margin of error, if you like, is fairly close. So, I would certainly see that as a reasonable level to hold. The operation of our department is clearly on a school year, calendar year or whatever basis, and quite often what happens is that 30 June, in a sense, is an arbitrary time. Whilst obviously it is there for budgetary and reporting purposes, in terms of our programs it is often quite arbitrary. Therefore, we can have situations

where programs are funded, announced, or whatever and for various reasons the planning and the lead time involved do not necessarily fit in with the financial year scenario.

Again, we find that at any given point in time we need to look at whatever that snapshot cut off period is and assess then what the commitments are against the cash held, and the same applies to schools and institutes. In our case, quite clearly in relation to major investments for technology we can allocate and hold aside amounts for significant investments only to find that a whole set of processes have to be gone through to have those investments approved or you are undertaking cost benefit analyses and you are delayed. The VLE project is an example. I think we earlier referred to the VLE announcement in the plan. That was prepared 18 months to two years ago and was for \$7 million over two years. In terms of the VLE project, less would be spent in 1998-99, then there would be a carry over with more planned to be spent in 1999-2000.

A similar thing occurred with Y2K. Overall, we made an assessment of the order of \$9 million to correct the Y2K scenario. I guess what you do in terms of budgeting is to put aside that sort of number, get the best advice you can regarding cash flow, but knowing that, even if something slips, the fact is that you must provide for that level of unavoidable cost rule being incurred. In a sense, the fact that we have looked at our cash situation and, if you like, have put aside that level for these sorts of contingencies or unavoidable costs again is just good business. A whole range of factors will impinge on when it is spent. I am not sure whether that answers your question.

**Ms WHITE:** The part you have not addressed is the increase in that 12 month period from \$86 million to \$143 million. What is that due to?

**Mr Treloar:** I am advised that the \$143 million includes almost \$56 million of accrual provisions. Those accrual provisions relate mainly to long service leave, leave entitlements, depreciation and those sorts of issues in the accrual accounting environment.

**Ms WHITE:** Will you categorise them? Of that \$56 million, how much is attributed to long service leave and so on?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** We can take that question on notice and provide the honourable member with those details.

**Mr Treloar:** That is in terms of the exact details of the numbers but, essentially, long service leave, leave entitlements and depreciation are the key issues.

**Ms WHITE:** In clarification, Mr Treloar, did you say that \$34 million would be a reasonable sum to keep in cash reserves?

**Mr Treloar:** I prefaced that remark—

**Ms WHITE:** I simply missed the figure.

**Mr Treloar:** Yes; 2 per cent would equal \$34 million. It is not accurate to say that it must be 2 per cent; I am really saying that you make a judgment of that sort of level—

**Ms WHITE:** I understand that; I simply misheard the figure.

**Mr Treloar:** I make the point as well that a 2 per cent margin in a \$1.7 billion budget, which has now increased, is a very low margin of error. In any business of that size, 2 per cent is a low margin of error.

**Ms WHITE:** I refer again to the Three Year Forward Strategy that the Opposition obtained last year. Given that the Minister has publicly stated that the difference between the total budget task for his department and the cut from Treasury

would be made up from cash reserves, which items listed will now be made up from cash reserves?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Mr Treloar can answer that question.

**Mr Treloar:** The first point is the difference being made up from cash reserves. We provided an answer earlier in the day that in fact the difference is funded not just by cash reserves. It is very clear from this document to which you have been referring that in addition to the Treasury savings requirement there is a range of reallocations and also the use of cash. In fact, the document itself has a particular line 'Use of cash reserves'.

**Ms WHITE:** That is \$6 million for this year?

**Mr Treloar:** Yes, and \$13.3 million in the previous year.

**Ms WHITE:** That is a bit different from the figure the Minister has been using.

**Mr Treloar:** That is an issue for the Minister to address. The point I am making is that the difference between the budget savings amount for Treasury and the total of this document reflects not just the use of cash: it is clearly a total—

**Ms WHITE:** The Minister thinks it will in this year.

**Mr Treloar:** With respect, I do not wish to engage on that issue; that is for the Minister. It is very clear from the document that there is a series of reallocations and reallocation strategies in here. This is described as a total task, and we described it in a number of ways earlier in the day. I make the point of fact that the difference between the Treasury savings figure and the total of this document is not just the use of cash reserves. That is just a factual statement. If there are other issues they are not for me to comment on.

**Ms WHITE:** I note that that contradicts what the Minister has stated publicly. The Minister has this cash reserve of \$143 million. How does the Minister justify this build up of cash reserves when at the same time schools are being closed, grants to schools are being frozen and TAFE is getting a very significant cut in this budget? Given that the use of cash reserves is a one-off and they are being used seemingly to fund recurrent expenses, what happens when you run out of your cash reserves?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** As has already been explained to the member for Taylor, the figure is not \$143 million. In fact, as Mr Treloar has already stated, the \$55.8 million is in the accrual provisions for long service leave, depreciation and so on. So, when you are looking at it in accrual terms, the actual adjustment of cash holdings is \$87 million rather than \$143 million, because you have to deduct \$55 million from that figure of about \$143 million. The fact is that, as I said this morning, this is a floating situation. Issues arise and diminish all the time. As I said earlier this morning, we did not undertake the school closures that we had planned for last year and we therefore had to look at where else we could achieve those savings. So, we went into the cash reserves to be able to do that, but other areas within this document fluctuate. It is a floating document, as we have said all the time. Changes occur in this department from week to week and we move with those changes, ensuring that we meet our bottom line of \$39.3 million.

**Mr Treloar:** I will follow the Minister's comments with another example. One of the items mentioned in the document was the continued rationalisation of school bus routes, and we indicated a figure of about \$1.7 million. At that time we were expecting that to be absorbed by pressure on industry rates, and that was netted out in the arithmetic of the document. The rationalisation of school bus routes continues

and has achieved these numbers, simply in the implementation of the policy. That is occurring. Because of the work we are doing with the Bus and Coach Association and the industry itself we can and do predict that there will be significant demand for an increase in payments to bus contractors. In this plan we expected to have paid out on those already, and we have not.

We are saying that we have made those savings, quite deliberately, because it was simply to go and look at the demographic situation, to look at every bus route, to be equitable about the provision of buses and to produce the savings by applying the policy; but, in fact, with negotiations occurring with the industry, the extent of the increases is not yet known. It is very clear from the bus industry and its indications to Government and members around country South Australia, in particular, that there is significant pressure on the funding. In a sense, we have made allowance for that but it has not yet come to pass as a Bill. That will come out of the woodwork, it will go through the process of negotiation and it will have to have approval processes.

I do not want to speculate, but you can see what the plan did. The plan indicated that we would not make any of those savings; we would put it all back into increases to bus contractors. All I am saying is that that situation has not disappeared. It is definitely likely that we will want to do that and that is reflected in an increase in the cash. The requirement for us to pay those things might have slipped by three months, but in my view, in giving advice to the Minister on prudent management of cash reserves, I would want to say that we put aside funds for that purpose. It is like the Y2K scenario.

**Ms WHITE:** Why is it like the Y2K scenario in budgetary terms?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Y2K is an issue that this department and every other department is facing. It is a matter of ensuring that not only computers within all departments—and in our case it includes computers in schools—but also lifts, automatic doors and a range of things—anything with a computer chip in it—are Y2K compliant. For example, some 1 331 suppliers to this department have been surveyed and the situation concerning 37 of those suppliers involves upgrade and repair costs of \$1.6 million for critical building systems such as lifts, security and fire systems. We budgeted some \$9 million on our best estimates as to what we thought this might cost us. Until we get further down the track, because not all testing has been completed, we will not know the final figure. The estimates are our best estimates of what we thought we might have to pay.

**Mr SCALZI:** Can the Minister indicate specific programs which will be funded under the Government's Early Years Strategy?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** This is a continued commitment of the Early Years Strategy. The Hon. Rob Lucas, when Minister for Education in the previous Liberal Government, started off the Early Years Strategy. The sum of \$32.5 million was allocated towards that strategy, recognising that the early years is the area where we need to target some of our funding to ensure that we identify young students with a literacy or numeracy problem and target the money to those years.

Certainly, it has been well accepted at schools. As I said earlier, the number of speech pathologists has increased by 72 per cent. This is a strategy which is hitting at the right end of schooling. The sum of \$4.25 million in early assistance grants went to all schools, that is, from reception to year 2,

and preschools in March 1999. Additional grants of nearly \$1 million went to schools for special programs. The Government has committed \$50 million to the Early Years Strategy since 1994 and it has impacted over 140 000 children since 1995.

We have allocated nearly \$8.2 million in 1999-2000 for the following programs: the Early Assistance Program; Reading Recovery Program; speech pathology; psychology services; First Start; school entry assessment; assessment and reporting in preschools; foundation areas; and basic skills test. There is a wide area where we are directing resources to increase abilities and to try to identify any difficulties that students are having and to correct them at a very early age rather than students experiencing those difficulties and, for instance, reaching years 9 and 10 and not having the ability to go on or getting bored with school and then wanting to drop out. The focus remains on students who have difficulty in literacy and numeracy. We provide either direct support or professional development for teachers so that they can identify and undertake programs to correct those literacy and numeracy problems with those young children.

**Mr SCALZI:** I refer to Budget Paper 4, Volume 2, page 8.17, Output 1.2. What impact will the proposed GST have on South Australian Government schools?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Where does one start? The GST is a moving feast in terms of negotiations between the Commonwealth Government and the Democrats and what has resulted from those negotiations. We have seen what was going to be a 10 per cent GST across all goods and services with certain exceptions (being education, health and a number of other areas) now being a GST which will not apply on basic foods but which will still, of course, give exemptions to education.

There will be a GST on books but in terms of schools, if they pay the GST, then they will be able to use that to claim a rebate, so in net terms schools will not pay a GST on books. The exemptions that have been stated by the Parties cover the current categories of the wholesale sales tax system and include: savoury snacks and confectionery; restaurant and take-away meals; fully prepared, ready-to-eat meals sold in supermarkets; and bakery products other than bread.

I am advised that we have a further update as at 22 June (last night). In terms of education, the Government is to seek a ruling from the Commissioner of Taxation on the definition of 'education services' that will be GST free. As members would be aware, both I and the Premier have written to the Prime Minister asking that the goods and services charge that applies in South Australia be GST free. We still have not received a reply, either officially or unofficially, as to whether that will be the case. We have been asked for more clarification in terms of what the fee actually contains. So, we still await the Federal Government's decision on that.

We have been pressing that it be GST free and believe that it is supplying goods and materials or services and materials that are core to education in South Australia. The ruling from the Commissioner of Taxation on the definition of 'education services' will address all instruction for students either directly or indirectly related to the school curriculum, excursions supervised by schools and school camps. This is one area which falls into the definition that we were previously advised by the Federal Government, that is, that school excursions unless related to curriculum may not be GST free. If we can get that definition on 'education services' it will clear up the issue.

The ruling also encompasses all issues highlighted by the Democrats, and they were in this previous document that I read out. We know that education is GST free. It includes preschool education and primary and secondary schools. We are working with Price Waterhouse Coopers, and it is giving us information on a very regular basis about the changes taking place so that we are right up-to-date with matters of education and the GST. The department has taken a number of steps to assess the impact of a GST on Government schools. We have consulted with other States to identify common issues in terms of avoiding duplication of effort in our response to the Commonwealth Government. We have sought clarification on specific issues—for example, the materials and services charge that operates in South Australian schools—and we have identified departmental officers to ascertain the impact of a GST on all areas within the department and have planned appropriate strategies for that.

The initial assessment indicates this: in terms of school canteens the Commonwealth Government will support the Democrats' suggestion that school canteens be input taxed, unless continuing consultation can develop more appropriate means to reduce the compliance costs for school-based organisations. At the moment, we are advised that excursions are GST free if they are directly related to the curriculum and are not predominantly recreational. If you consider whether the annual ski trip undertaken by a school is curriculum or educational, you could always argue that you were studying chemistry and the formation of water molecules and snow in terms of geography; but as I said we are waiting for that ruling on the definition from the Commissioner of Taxation.

Expenditure on school buses is GST free, because they are provided at no cost to students. So, the department can claim input tax credits for the GST that we would pay on fuel, repairs, contractors fees, etc. As I said, the Premier and I have written to the Prime Minister seeking clarification on the materials and services charge. As yet, there is still a way to go with the GST. Obviously, it will be worked through over the remaining months of this year and prior to its implementation in June 2000.

**Mr SCALZI:** I refer to the School Card. I continue to receive inquiries about why the School Card rules and procedures have changed. What has been the effect of this?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Some major changes to School Card eligibility criteria were implemented in 1997, and that followed Government action to close a loophole which had allowed some families earning up to \$30 000 a year to access School Card. Prior to that there were about 104 000 recipients of School Card, and it had been growing at quite a rate. Obviously, some people were ensuring that their accountants were very creative so that they could try to access School Card. We closed that loophole.

Approvals are now based on a family's eligibility to receive the Commonwealth's maximum family payment. The change resulted in more families being able to access School Card. As a result of these changes, approvals from 1996 to 1997 dropped by 9 224, but that has to be seen in context because, as a result of increased eligibility for social security benefits and other factors, approvals since 1988 increased by 48 per cent. So, in 1988 there were 48 597 School Card recipients: by 1998 this had increased to 93 870.

This year, further changes were introduced to ensure that the benefits of the scheme were directed to those families most in need. The benefit has been extended to cover full-time four year old students attending primary schools. Some inconsistencies had been noticed with the use of Centrelink

information for approvals, but they have now been overcome. Proof of family income is now established by presentation of the following health care cards: New Start allowance, New Start Mature Age allowance, Partner allowance, Sickness allowance, Parenting Payment Partnered Special Payment and Widow allowance. Other methods of proving eligibility are 1999 Parent Payment Single Pension Concession card, maximum Austudy and maximum youth allowance and verification that the student is in foster care; or they can complete an income assessment application.

If the card they have shows that they are ineligible according to that list, they can still complete an income assessment application, and that will be considered obviously on the level of income that the family receives; or they can make an application under hardship provisions. For instance, if someone who has lost their job previously earned a significant income, that is obviously hardship conditions, so the department considers School Card under those conditions.

We acknowledge that in some cases the proof of eligibility requirements has caused some difficulties. Last year the department tried to work with Centrelink to put this on a database so that, rather than following a paper trail, we could do it electronically. We ran into a problem in terms of privacy provisions. As a result, the notifications went out later than we would have liked, and it created some confusion at the start of the year. Centrelink is still working with us to attempt to get an electronic transfer and recognition in place this year. We will have to wait to see whether we can get around that privacy provision or what exactly we can do in that area. It certainly solved a problem in terms of the paper work that families had to undertake and that undertaken by the department.

School Card rates for 1999 are \$110 per primary student and \$170 per secondary student. Non-government schools may even make further fee concessions available to families eligible for School Card. I know that one private school in my area gives a 40 per cent concession on school fees to School Card holders. So, that amounts to significantly more than \$110 or \$170. To reiterate: if those parents who have not been successful are in hardship, they should get in touch with the department and ensure that they are reassessed.

**Ms RANKINE:** I refer to the list of capital works projects on page 834. I note that there is no mention of the multi-purpose facility to be built at the Golden Grove High School. When will moneys for that project be released? I understand that it has been in the process of being developed since 1993. The school currently uses the Gleeson building. Gleeson wants those classrooms back. This multi-purpose facility will provide the school with five teaching areas, dance and drama studios, a gym and an assembly/lecture hall. I understand that the Minister is supposed to be releasing \$350 000 for that project and allowing the school to borrow \$450 000. They are now desperate for that money. When will that proceed?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I am aware of this project and that negotiations have been ongoing with the school in terms of it servicing a loan to support the building of the structure. I will get an update for the honourable member on that. I remember seeing something about this a couple of months ago, but it would have been only in terms of the progress of negotiations. I will get an update for the honourable member on exactly where that sits.

**Ms RANKINE:** I understand that the department has required it to sell some land to service that loan and that there are problems with it.



**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I am not aware of that and will ascertain the answer and get it for you today.

**Ms RANKINE:** Which schools will be involved in the initial local school management trial, which I understand is due to commence in the third term, and what performance measures have been put in place to assess the success or otherwise of the trial? Will the program continue to be assessed if it proceeds past trial stage?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Partnerships 21, as I said in my opening statement this morning, will be a very significant shift in the delivery of education in South Australia. We have a task group currently drawing up the finer details of operations for Partnerships 21 and those details will be going out to schools ready for the commencement of term 3. We have said that schools will nominate or volunteer to be part of the early trial and they are obviously waiting on more information from the department before that decision is made.

We are currently looking at a range of schools that would be involved in the trial, but that has not been settled at this stage. I remember seeing a list of about 12 schools, but I cannot remember them off the top of my head. They have not yet been ticked off as those that would be undertaking the trial. They are obviously waiting for more detailed information on how it will operate before deciding whether they still want to be involved in the trial. The trial is set up to look at the operations of Partnerships 21 to try to identify whether there are any gremlins in the system that we can identify before putting it out into the field next year. We do not believe there will be, but things always come up that you cannot predict. Regarding the guidelines that will be given out in term 3, the trial will indicate whether we need to change any of them or how we have operated.

**Ms RANKINE:** Are there any specific performance measures by which you will assess the trial?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I will hand over to the CEO.

**Mr Spring:** That is not the kind of exercise that the trial is about. Right now we have large numbers of people involved in working parties and they are engaged in translating the recommendations of the community Partnerships report—the Professor Ian Cox report—into implementation. Because Partnerships 21 affects most areas of schools' operations, we have in place at the moment a range of matters which regulate schools—legislation, regulations, administrative handbooks and manuals. We are intending in the third and fourth terms to have a number of volunteer schools that put up their hand for take up.

For the first part of the process schools have to voluntarily consult with the community and staff and make a decision to express interest. From those schools we will be approaching a number of strategically placed schools to work with us in the process of translating the current administrative instructions which define the way schools have operated and which have been built up over 100 years and, where necessary, altering them so that by the end of the year we end up with a draft that will contain the way in which schools will operate under the new mode. It is not a pilot in the sense of deciding whether local management will work as we know that it works. It has been working here since the early 1980s. South Australia led Australia in this field. There are things in global budgeting, staffing flexibility and governance that need to be changed so that people get the full benefits. That is the process we will be going through.

Groups of people will be sitting around a table with teachers, deputy principals, school council chairs and principals of those schools to work through the process. As

those groups advise us on the changes, we will then deal with the group of schools that put up their hand to take up in the year 2000. There will be about a three month period for those who put up their hand in which we will be training the principals and office managers. For anybody whose role changes a massive training program will take place—the Government has put in place \$3.2 million per annum for that training program to take place. We will work with the trial schools and develop documentation and we will be taking the schools that volunteer to be in it through the revised documentation. There will be a second check as people from all shapes and sizes of schools look at the material and say, 'Yes, it will work for us' or 'It won't work for us.'

That will culminate in November and during that period while the people concerned are being trained they will also be working on their triennial and annual plans, which will be more sophisticated versions of the statements of purpose that schools develop each year and report against every year. That is the process. Depending on how many come in this year and how many choose to come in next year, we will be repeating the process several times as different intakes put up their hand. It is wholly voluntary and they will come in at their own pace.

**Ms RANKINE:** Mr Spring made the point that it is voluntary, as did the Minister in response to another question when he talked about the choice regarding local school management. If a school community decides to undertake local school management and finds that it does not suit the needs, will the Minister guarantee that it will be able to withdraw? At what point will the Government decide that it is compulsory for all schools to come on board for local school management?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The agreement that will be undertaken with schools that opt into Partnerships 21 will be a three year agreement. We would want to see that that agreement was carried out, but if a school got itself into an emergency situation or one that was diabolical—

**Ms RANKINE:** What if it did not come up to expectations? You are saying that no formal assessment is being made and that you have decided that it works. What if the school community decides it does not work: can it opt out?

**Mr Spring:** It is a strange question because to the best of my knowledge in Australia, New Zealand and the UK it has never happened. Nobody has ever decided, once they have the freedoms and have the initiative, to pull out. It has not happened.

**Ms RANKINE:** In Victoria a few schools might want to pull out now.

**Mr Spring:** No.

**Ms RANKINE:** I think so.

**Mr Spring:** Are you talking about Schools for the Future or Schools of the Third Millennium? No schools have pulled out of Schools for the Future. There has been some orchestrated industrial action in three schools in Victoria to my knowledge—occasionally I talk to people there. That is not Schools for the Future but a different program called Schools of the Third Millennium.

**Ms RANKINE:** It started off the same as this, basically.

**Mr Spring:** No, it is separate legislation.

**Ms RANKINE:** But with the same concept.

*Mr Scalzi interjecting:*

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order!

**Ms RANKINE:** It's the same concept—don't huff at me: I was over there.

**Mr Spring:** With respect, if you want clarification, I can tell you.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order!

*Mr Scalzi interjecting:*

**Ms RANKINE:** I am not generalising: I was actually over there when they were on strike, so I know what was going on.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order! The member for Wright will come to order. She has asked a supplementary question.

**Ms RANKINE:** So will the member for Hartley. He need not huff at me across the Chamber.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order!

**Mr Spring:** The Schools of the Third Millennium proposal grew out of a request by school principals to the Government for additional powers. After 18 months of consultation, the Government agreed to that request and passed legislation to that effect. To the best of my knowledge, about 50 schools have opted in. A result has been obtained in three schools (which are known to me) where the school councils have made a democratic choice. One of them actually took five democratic votes, and each time the majority in favour of a parent elected council increased. Industrial action is industrial action. As the honourable member would know, an election is to be called shortly.

**Ms RANKINE:** The 300 parents who attended the public meeting that I attended last week would dispute that the council was democratically elected.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

**Mr CONDOUS:** What level of funding do schools receive through special purpose grants?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Special purpose grants comprise a significant amount of the funding received by schools. There is a total of 88 grants (both State and Commonwealth) amounting to \$71.5 million. Major support grants include: school card; Back to School; DEC*Stech* 2001; Ready, Set, Go; the Commonwealth literacy program; early assistance; basic skills; furniture replacement; and reading recovery. On top of all those grants is the flexible initiative funding of \$28 million for South Australian schools. So, \$71.5 million plus \$28 million amounts to almost \$100 million worth of funding for schools.

Under the Partnerships 21 initiative, we are looking at the best way to allocate funding to maximise the impact at local level. A number of these grants are allocated during the year in small bits and pieces. As I said earlier, the idea of having local management is that, for instance, in October 1999 when school councils sit down to construct their budget we want to be able to supply them with a figure that will take account of all the grants that they are likely to receive in the following school year (2000), so that they can work out a budget for exactly where they will spend their money.

This will give schools a particular advantage because they will be able to budget 12 months in advance rather than living a hand-to-mouth existence, so to speak, where a grant comes along and they say, 'What will we spend this grant on?' and two or three months later another grant comes along, so they are working on a bit-by-bit basis. This will give them much more certainty about the level of funding that the school will receive, and they will be able to plan on a much longer term basis than schools currently can.

**Mr CONDOUS:** As Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs, I would like to know whether the Government has any plans for how to combat racism in our schools. Although we pride ourselves on being a multicultural

community with 152 different nationalities, there still exists a minority undercurrent of racism in the schoolyard.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** In February 1999, the Government established a Countering Racism project to complement the work of the National Subcommittee on Racism in Schools, which was established in 1997. The South Australian project will build on Countering Racism in Schools resources developed nationally, which include case studies, an annotated bibliography and a website. The outcomes of the South Australian project will include: a whole of department policy and plan, grievance procedures, curriculum guidelines, and professional development support. The renewed policy and grievance procedures will provide a guide to departmental sites and personnel in addressing all forms of racism in line with departmental policy and current Government legislation.

Through the recently released South Australian departmental plan for Aboriginal education in early childhood schooling (a four year plan running between 1999 and the year 2003), a range of strategies will be undertaken to address racism and increase the retention rate of indigenous students. This area is of particular concern, because the absenteeism of indigenous students is double that of other students. We will work with parents of indigenous students to look at ways to interest these young children in school or to ensure that they turn up for school on a more regular basis.

Aboriginal parents are keen to work with departmental officers and local principals to develop strategies for this because they, too, want the best for their children. They want to ensure that their children receive adequate schooling so that they will have the best chance of gaining employment later in life. This is a very good plan, which both the department and the indigenous population are working on hand in hand, and I look forward to the outcome of it.

Part of this plan involves the development of curriculum materials which will provide a practical guide to support teachers to counteract racism against Aboriginal people. These materials will relate to learning areas of: English studies, English studies of society and environment, health, physical education, and the arts. It is anticipated that those materials will be ready by the end of 1999 so that we can get them into schools in the year 2000.

This project is being supported by a redirection of funding for curriculum and equity standards. We have budgeted \$50 000 towards the development of these materials for the year 1999-2000. As the member for Colton says, whilst we live in a multicultural society and believe that racism is not a problem, there are still areas where some racism does occur and we need to be vigilant. Through this plan and working with the indigenous population I trust that we will ensure a better outcome in that area.

**Mr CONDOUS:** Will the Minister indicate what areas of support exist for children with learning disabilities or learning difficulties?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Mr Spring has a particular interest in this area, so I will ask him to comment.

**Mr Spring:** In South Australia, 10 to 16 per cent of children and adolescents have learning difficulties and exhibit problems in development and academic skills. The department distinguishes between students with learning difficulties and those with learning disabilities, which comprise 2 to 4 per cent of all children. The World Health standard is 2.5 per cent. The developmental and academic skills of these students are significantly below the expectation for children of their age and general ability. Class teachers support all these

children. The department's Learning Difficulties Support Team is a statewide service providing training and advice for parents, Learning Assistance Program (LAP) volunteers and school services officers and teachers from preschool to year 12.

The current enterprise agreement provides salaries for schools to support children with learning difficulties on a proportional basis. It is expected that \$2.783 million of the enterprise agreement funding will be allocated to students with learning difficulties in 1999-2000. Additional support is provided through such sources as: early intervention grants—\$2 million for 1998-9 (this is provided by schools and managed by principals); \$2 million for support in the light of BST results; and there has been a 72 per cent increase in the number of speech pathologists since the Liberal Government took office.

**Ms WHITE:** I will continue with respect to Partnerships 21. Will all schools, regardless of whether or not they join the local management project, continue to access the flexible resources budget of \$28 million per annum that has been announced to be ongoing?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckley:** Yes, they will. As I said earlier, there are no penalties against schools that do not wish to come into Partnerships 21. The option is there for them in terms of when they want to come in. They might not want to come in during year one. A number of small schools particularly in the country have indicated to me that they might want to sit back and have a look for the first year and join at a later date. That option is available to them. There is no compulsion in this scheme whatsoever. It is one of the beauties of it. It is totally voluntary. As to the issue that the member raises in terms of the \$28 million in flexible funding, there will be no changes to that. Those schools that do not come in will still have access to that flexible funding.

**Ms WHITE:** Central to local school management are issues concerning how schools are staffed. The Minister has given a guarantee several times publicly that schools will continue to be allocated staff on a system-wide basis under Partnerships 21. Is that still the case, because there has certainly been a suggestion at many of the meetings I have attended that that will not be the case. Is the Minister guaranteeing that schools will continue to be allocated staffing on a system-wide basis, or will staff requirements and a percentage of engagements be determined at a school level? If so, what will that percentage be?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckley:** The formula for staffing will not change. I have said that on a number of occasions. The teachers will remain employees of the department, so in terms of a teacher taking up a contract, a permanent position or principal appointments, all those sorts of things will remain with head office and with the department. Those sites that take up local management will have some increased staffing flexibility and more responsibility for human resource management. That flexibility will respect current industrial awards and legislation requirements. The legislation requirements under the Education Act and those under industrial relations regulations and agreements that have been made will continue. There will be no change to those.

A site staffing plan will be included in the annual operational plan to guide the strategic planning and deployment of the site's human resources, and some proposed features in that include notional allocation of staffing costs which will be included in a global budget statement, to give sites increased flexibility in determining their staffing mix, a more strategic and flexible approach to local staffing with sites able

to carry forward staffing allocations into the next year, and increased flexibility in determining periods of long service leave. There will be some increased flexibility there but, as has occurred in the past, those teacher placements will still be made by the department.

If, for instance, a school wants a specialist teacher of some kind, it decides that it will spend its money, just as it does with flexible funding. At the moment a school has the ability to bring in a speech pathologist or to bring in a specialist learning teacher. That will not change. That remains the same and the staffing will still be done through the department.

**Ms WHITE:** How will the Minister ensure that no school will be worse off under the global formula of funding in this project? You have a shrinking budget, and you are saying that disadvantaged schools will be better off. How will you do that?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckley:** One of the issues that I put to Professor Cox and the working party when they were looking at developing the document for me on local school management, Partnerships 21, was that we must end up with better educational outcomes for students under this particular system, and that schools that came into Partnerships 21 would not be worse off. Mr Spring has been developing models for this with his working parties, so I will hand over to him because he has more of a handle on the finer details.

**Mr Spring:** Schools essentially obtain money from several sources. There is a grant which is determined on a formula which relates to the number of students, so you can very easily calculate from year to year if there are rises or falls in enrolments, what money they should get and, providing the formula is the same, obviously they cannot be worse off. Similarly, flexible initiative funding is determined by formula in the same way, as are all the staffing allocations. They are all enrolment sensitive or they relate to a base component for a certain kind of school, and the rest are determined by calculations taking into account student enrolments.

In addition to those, there are various Commonwealth and State amounts of dollars for the disadvantaged, and again that is on a per capita basis. I think the only exception to that is the Commonwealth special education money, and that is linked with State disability money and the amounts are determined by the Minister on advice from his advisory committee. Essentially, the answer is that a school global budget is determined by a number of different enrolment-based formulae or, in the case of maintenance, it is the characteristics of the building, so you can use those same formulae as we do now every year because every year school enrolments change. A school will be able to satisfy itself, as we will, that it is not short changed.

**Mr WILLIAMS:** With respect to illicit drugs in our schools, the Premier issued a press release on 30 April saying that a committee was looking into the issue of drugs in schools. There have been several articles in the local press, particularly in the *Advertiser*, and one in particular of 24 May stated:

All South Australian school children will be educated about the dangers of drugs as part of a two year \$6.2 million strategy announced by the Premier, Mr Olsen, yesterday.

It goes on to say that the education program would target all primary and secondly schools and that it would cost \$800 000 each year. How will this money be spent? I have a constituent who contacted my office recently over this issue. This constituent happens to be the Regional Chairman of Life Education South-East, and he wants to know whether the

Government intends reinventing the wheel or intends channelling this money through the Life Education system.

He tells me that the Life Education network currently operates in about 253 schools, which is about 30 per cent of the schools in the State. Most of its funding comes from the community, although just under \$200 000 is provided by the Drug and Alcohol Services Council, but that goes into the head office which provides programs and develops videos, etc for the schools to use. All the moneys that it expends in running the program in schools is raised in the communities. Will the Government reinvent the wheel and set up another bureaucracy to run this program, or will it utilise the Life Education system which is already operating?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The Minister for Human Services, the Attorney-General, the Minister for Correctional Services and I, along with the Premier, have been working on this particular program for a drugs initiative. One of our concerns is the amount of overlap currently occurring. What we want to do is eliminate the overlap in resources currently being spent within schools and the community on educating people about drugs and undertaking action in that area and spend the dollar in the best possible way we can. I think I am right in saying that the Premier announced a \$2.6 million strategy on drugs. We are allocating a total of \$400 000 per year over the next two years to establish a new drug education coordinator position to work with schools, existing staff and district officers.

The focus of that work will be on developing training materials to ensure appropriate drug curriculum from reception to year 12; developing a whole school approach to harm minimisation; facilitating professional development for teachers; linking community agencies with schools to ensure students involved with illicit drugs are getting the support they need; and supporting the schools in the management of drug related incidents. The program will complement an estimated \$122 000 per annum which South Australia is expected to receive from the Commonwealth over the next four years as part of a COAG agreement on national drug education. It will be used for use in local school and community drug summits as part of the Tough on Drugs in Schools initiative.

I know that Life Education has played a significant role. It operates a semitrailer, so to speak, in my electorate, and I think it also covers some of the northern suburbs as well as the Riverland—and it does a very good job. Currently we are working through this program to see exactly how it will be used in the future. Its funding comes from the Minister for Human Services. The Education Department does not fund Life Education: it is funded by the Minister for Human Services. Currently we are working out exactly what its role will be. I am sure it will be an ongoing one, but it is a matter of ensuring that we are not overlapping. For instance, at the moment Life Education provides programs on not only illicit drugs but general drugs, for instance coffee, cigarettes and all those things that affect school children. It starts from a very young age, basically from about year 1 or 2, and continues right throughout the school program. It is focusing on not just illicit drugs, on which this particular program wants to focus.

The Australian Medical Association also puts money into schools, the community, cancer awareness and those sorts of areas. The Anti-Cancer Association is also currently putting money into schools in terms of health issues. What we want to do is pool all this money and then say: 'How can we make sure that we are not overlapping in the spending of that money so that we are putting out a drugs and a health

program?' This \$400 000 over the next two years will establish those positions that I have mentioned and develop those training materials that will work hand in hand with other health issues in the schools.

**The Hon. R.B. SUCH:** My question, in some ways, relates to the earlier one from the member for MacKillop. Has any consideration been given to following the Northern Territory model—with which Mr Spring would be very familiar—of having a police officer attached to a high school or area school to work with young people, not simply in a traditional policing role but as a support person and a youth worker as well?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The Minister for Police has indicated an increased role for police in schools and I know that discussions between the Chief Executive Officer, the Minister for Police and Mr Spring have been ongoing, so I will hand over to Mr Spring, who can advise us of those discussions.

**Mr Spring:** Yes, that is under active consideration. Along with programs such as Life Education which play a valuable role, one of the things that is under active consideration at the moment in this area is to get the authenticity of the view of working policemen coming into schools and running programs not only for students but also for teachers as part of that professional development role. We are working to develop, very soon, a comprehensive drugs strategy which will outline how the pieces fit together.

**The Hon. R.B. SUCH:** My next question relates to truancy. What are the current levels of truancy, what are the trends and what activities are in place to deal with this issue?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I often think that truancy in schools relates to the fact that perhaps the young people are not interested in the curriculum that is being presented, and it is one of the areas which, I believe, vocational education training in our schools will really improve. What we have to remember, though, is that the truancy figures are not large, so to speak. On average, school attendance figures over the past 10 years remain around 92 per cent. On average, 61 per cent of non-attendance was for illness and family reasons. A recent comprehensive analysis of term 2 1997 data reported publicly on absence rates for all school year levels and it was shown that significant differences occurred between primary and secondary, indicating that years 10 and 11 students have the highest absentee rate. One in four students attended each day in term 2 in 1997.

This reporting process will be continued this year so we can compare figures and see whether that is being improved upon or deteriorating. Schools monitor non-attendance. They can refer chronic non-attendants to one of 10 student attendance counsellors, and the number of chronic truants in the State is about 150. So, of 176 000 school students in the public school system, about 150 are chronic truants. Approximately 100 reports a year are made to Family and Youth Services when truancy is part of a presenting problem. A new protocol between my department and Family and Youth Services has just been agreed. The first annual report is not due until December 1999, but one DETE support service at Felixstow has made four referrals to FAYS so far in 1999.

Although parents can be prosecuted for non-attendance of a child, no prosecutions occurred in 1997 and 1998. Strategies that we have in place to work with students are as follows: working with their parents to ensure that their parents are well informed of the truancy of their son or daughter; providing counselling and other support services; and joint initiatives with other agencies, including the SA

Police, who refer truants from the age of six to 14 years to student attendance counsellors and notify the parent, the guardian or the school. It is one area in which we are working as closely as we can with the South Australia Police and getting good cooperation from them. When they are on their patrols, so to speak, during school hours and notice someone walking along the street who is of school age, or appears to be of school age, they will approach them and assess whether or not they should be at school, and they can then return them to the school. As I said earlier, Aboriginal non-attendance is double that of non-Aboriginal students and is particularly a problem in Ceduna and Port Augusta.

Last April when I was visiting schools on the West Coast I had discussions with the principal at Ceduna and he mentioned that many students turn up for the first part of the day but that following lunchtime a number of them are missing. So, it is a local school management matter. The member for Flinders wrote to me on the issue at Ceduna earlier this year and I suggested that a working group be formed, including the police in Ceduna, community services, the Aboriginal population and the school, to sit down and try to devise a local strategy and examine reasons why the young Aboriginal population has much higher absentee rates than the non-Aboriginal population has. It is something on which we must work and are continuing to work. The issue of Aboriginal students is being addressed by the four year plan I spoke of earlier, where it seeks to work with Aboriginal parents in getting a better attendance rate for their children.

**The Hon. R.B. SUCH:** I was pleased to hear that the problem of truants is referred to other agencies as well as your own. Does that extend to students who are excluded or suspended? Is there an automatic referral to Family and Youth Services where there is a clear behavioural problem, or are they more or less left to flounder outside the school environment?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I will seek further information on that but to my knowledge, unless exclusions and expulsions become habitual, the matter is dealt with at the school and with the parents. School counsellors are also able to deal with that. The principals and local police liaise and cooperate closely to identify truants, so there is certainly cross agency collaboration in that area, and personnel counsellors and social workers can be brought in if the need arises. For instance, on a single exclusion or expulsion, a school counsellor, the principal and parents would work together. If that behaviour continues, obviously there are deeper problems, so other support agencies would be brought in to identify the problems.

Mr Spring has told me that our expectation is that schools will look after the students unless they are picked up by some other agency, such as Family and Youth Services. If the young person's well-being is in doubt they may well come to the notice of Family and Youth Services, and that is where they will become involved and work with the school to solve that problem.

**Ms WHITE:** Page 5.15 of Paper 2 of the Budget Statement states that Ready Set Go will have \$4.5 million per annum allocated for a further three years to support the Vocational Education in Schools Strategy. On page 1.5 of that same document, in table 1.3 entitled 'Major Expenditure Initiatives' the 1998-99 estimated result for vocational education is left blank. The Ready Set Go program was announced in June last year as an \$8.8 million program over three years. Will the Minister provide the actual figure for the 1998-99 estimated result and detail how much money has

been spent to date on Ready Set Go? In providing that answer will he please differentiate between the proportions of that spending coming from State and Commonwealth funds?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The initial Ready Set Go funding launched in 1997 was due to run out at 30 June this year. That program was put in place by the State Government to complement Federal Government Ready Set Go funding. I am advised that the allocation was \$6.073 million in 1998-99. Of that, \$4.362 million was State funds, \$1.17 million Commonwealth funding via the Australian National Training Authority, and \$.531 million Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs funds. In 1999-2000 the allocation is estimated to be \$5.931 million. As identified in the budget papers, the State Government has committed \$4.5 million for the next three years, bringing the total to \$13.5 million. So, for 1999-2000, State funds are \$4.5 million, Commonwealth Australian National Training Authority funds, \$1.17 million and the Commonwealth Department funds, \$.258 million.

**Ms WHITE:** The result for last year?

**Mr Treloar:** It is estimated we will spend it in 1998-99.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The full amount of \$6.073 million will be expended. I will take that question on notice and double check that figure for the honourable member.

**Ms WHITE:** How did schools access these funds, which schools received funds and how were they spent?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Those schools which run a VET in Schools program have access to the funds. Of the total budget from 1996 through to 1999, 79 per cent has gone directly to schools or school districts, 13 per cent has gone to a professional development and information strategy, 5 per cent has gone to research and feasibility studies, and 3 per cent has gone to coordination costs. That was the \$4.3 million that has been expended by the State Government over that period. To give some indication of the number of schools that set up programs in vocational education and training: in 1997 there were 76 schools; in 1998, 159; and in 1999 some 175 schools will be delivering VET in Schools. That is a 109 per cent increase in 1998 and a further increase of 10 per cent in 1999. I am advised that 13 593 students undertook recognised vocational education training in 1998 as part of the school curriculum.

Schools in all sectors conduct recognised VET in Schools activities as follows: 75.3 per cent of all Government schools, 96.4 per cent of Catholic schools and 61.7 per cent of independent schools. It is certainly a growing area. ANTA has been very supportive in providing \$500 000 for two vocational education training programs in each State. I need only remind the House of programs such as Naracoorte High School, which received \$247 000 for a project to grow Shiraz grapes, and the Loxton group of schools received a similar amount to deliver vocational education and training in the transport industry and associated industries in the Riverland.

Xavier College at Gawler received \$243 000 for a program which will deliver vocational education training in the area of horticulture, looking at the expansion of the green area, so to speak, north of Adelaide in the Adelaide Plains and the effect that Bolivar pipeline water will have on the Virginia area. They are working in cooperation with Gawler High School and Trinity College, so that those other two schools will have access to Xavier to undertake vocational education training. A significant amount of money is being taken up with gusto by schools.

The budget for the three years (1996 to 1999) for Ready, Set, Go was \$11.8 million. As I said, for 1998-99 it was \$4.362 million. I would not imagine that, with the uptake of this, any money would be left in that program whatsoever, but we will check for the member and clarify it for her.

**Ms WHITE:** I have a question on the legislative review. Page 8.1 of the Portfolio Statements includes as an outcome for the budget the legislative review of three Acts—the Education Act, the Children's Services Act, and I am unsure of the third Act. I am aware that the VEET Act is currently under review. Is there an intention to review the TAFE Act and, if not, why not? If so, what is the timetable for that and what issues will be addressed in that part of the review?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The honourable member is correct in saying that the VEET Act will be reviewed. TAFE now falls into the whole department, whereas before we had a Department of TAFE and a Department of Education and Children's Services. We are now looking to include TAFE in the Education Act, recognising that it is now under the one department, so it is involved under the one Act.

**Ms WHITE:** Does that mean, effectively, it will be a review of the TAFE Act?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Yes, it will be, but we will be looking to incorporate TAFE into the Education Act. We will not be coming up with another TAFE Act. We will be incorporating TAFE into the current Education Act, recognising the department's role of children's services, education, and training and further education.

**Ms WHITE:** The latter part of my question was about the time frame and what issues would be part of that TAFE section of the review.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** An issues paper should go out within the next few days. Since October last year, we have had public consultation and we have had some 2 000 pieces of input into that public consultation, and public meetings have also been held. The review group that I set up to look at the Act has now produced a paper which has collated the majority of ideas that have come out from the public in that time. That will go out for consultation within the next couple of weeks, and that consultation will continue until 15 October. At that time, we will collate, again, ideas that have arisen from that paper. My aim is to produce a draft Bill prior to Christmas so that we can then put that draft Bill out for further consultation with the community, and that should occur early in the new year. Following that consultation, we will bring a Bill into the House probably late in the first session of next year.

There are a number of issues in terms of more flexible management for TAFE, and that is coming into Partnerships 21. A number of other issues for TAFE in terms of delivery and management have arisen, and they are being cited in the issues paper which will go out over the next couple of weeks.

I have an answer for the member for Wright regarding Golden Grove High School. I knew I had seen something on this not too long ago. The honourable member would be aware that it involves a joint use project between Golden Grove High School and Gleeson College to fund the new facility. The joint cost of the project is between \$2.5 million and \$2.6 million. Gleeson College is contributing \$800 000. Approval has been given for Golden Grove High School to borrow \$450 000 towards the cost, plus \$400 000 as a cash contribution. I have agreed to the sale of some land which should provide about \$450 000 towards the cost of the hall. The Village Community Church is contributing \$100 000,

and the department will contribute \$350 000 to the project as well.

This project hinges on the sale of the land. Until we are sure that we can sell that land, the project will not go ahead. It is presently with the land section of DEHAA. It is expected that we will be able to advise of the sale within the next four to six weeks.

**Ms RANKINE:** Have you any idea that the land may not be sold?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Not that I am aware of, no; unless you have information of which we are not aware.

**Ms RANKINE:** You are saying that it is 'subject to the sale' of the land.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** In terms of 'subject to the sale' of the land, we must ensure that we have the money in hand for that. We do not want to start putting up the hall and then find that we have to wait two years until we can sell the land or get receipts from the sale of the land, so we want to ensure we have that money in hand.

**Mr SCALZI:** What major work is planned to further improve information technology services this year?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Information technology services are a very integral and increasing part of the budget of our department. We are looking at the feasibility of utilising a single Internet service provider which would give high speed, low cost access to the Internet for all schools and TAFE institutes. In terms of speed, quality and breadth of coverage, the implementation of this would be a first within Australia. This would mean, if it comes to fruition, that all schools would be linked up to the Internet in South Australia by the end of 1999, so those that could not be accessed by cabling would have access via satellite. So, regardless of whether you are at Ceduna or Penola, or wherever, the school would have access to the Internet.

It is very exciting for country schools because cabling for country schools and the supply by providers of cabling to remote areas is very important, certainly to those local schools. The big advantage in this is the capacity. At the moment those who log onto the Internet or have cabling to the Internet, from memory—and I stand to be corrected on this—have access to about 64 megawatts through the line. I stand to be corrected, but I believe that the capacity of this program will increase the capacity by more than three times. The reaction speed, therefore, that schools would have in accessing the Internet and getting information through the Internet could be significantly enhanced. The sites will be provided with tools to block access to web sites deemed to be inappropriate for the age level of children and students in their care, and e-mail addresses will be available for all staff and students.

The department's learning technology projects will provide models of best teaching and learning practice with learning technology and provide answers to, 'Are computers making a difference to student learning and, if so, what difference?'; support six discovery schools to research and explore models of best classroom practice where they can demonstrate, share and support in other schools; and support 20 discovery network teachers with .2 release time to extend further their good practices. So \$5.5 million will be provided for school cabling; \$300 000 will be provided for TAFE on-line courses as part of the department's virtual learning environment; and the virtual learning environment will provide on-line learning and support services to schools, TAFE students and departmental staff.

As I said, this will be a first in terms of Internet accessibility for any schools in Australia. So, South Australia will be leading the way. I am advised that all schools will have access to local calls. It means that there will be an elimination of ISDN charges, significantly reducing the yearly cost to schools under this particular project of accessing the Internet. That is a cost which is increasing each year as more schools come on-line and teachers access the Internet either for research or teaching aids.

**Mr SCALZI:** I was pleased to hear the Minister say that South Australia is leading the way in terms of access to the Internet. How do State schools compare with other schools in South Australia in that regard?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I cannot say how many computers are in independent or Catholic schools, but as I said earlier the \$85 million that this Government is expending on DECStech 2001 aims to provide one computer for every five children within classrooms. That has been taken up very vigorously. I cannot remember the exact number. The CEO might be able to help on the exact number of computers or on what sort of allocations have been made in that area.

**Mr Spring:** I can help on the comparative issue. The 1:5 is world standard. That is what most countries or states in the world are trying to achieve. So, we are right up with the best in the world, and there are only half a dozen places in that category. What is even more encouraging, though, is that recent surveys have shown that, in South Australian Government schools, the percentage of teachers who self identify as competent users of information technology is much higher than in any State in Australia of which I am aware. That reflects South Australia's long involvement in that and also the investment in the last couple of years in Decstech and professional development.

I can provide some details on the breakdown: 12 372 computers at a total cost of \$26.2 million have been purchased through the subsidy program which, given the size of South Australia comparatively, is a very large number. Subsidies provide schools with between \$500 and \$1 000 towards the cost. As the honourable member probably knows, schools can purchase or rent this equipment.

**Mr SCALZI:** I was really pleased with the Minister's response in terms of access to the Internet and South Australia leading the way. Given that all country schools in South Australia will be interconnected, how do we compare with other schools in general?

**Mr Spring:** Bearing in mind that I have some other experience, the schools I have walked around compare pretty well. We are not in any way suffering in terms of comparisons of what is available inside the school fence in Government schools.

**Mr SCALZI:** Given that the Centenary of Federation is just around the corner, how is the Government intending to celebrate this in schools and what are we doing about teaching civics and citizenship to our students?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Our schools will be involved in numerous activities celebrating the Centenary of Federation in the year 2001. An officer has been appointed on a .5 time basis. A travelling road show of Centenary of Federation information for schools and country communities is being developed. Federation Week in schools will be another highlight throughout the centenary year. The Federation Youth Project will include a web site, oral history, projects, forums, exhibitions and performances. There will be a Federation Youth Event in June 2001 and those details are currently being developed.

The department is developing a calendar of events, including regular events, for example, the X Site at the Royal Show, Come Out 2001, Science Week and individual school celebrations. Civics education remains a high priority for the department. Civics and citizenship education forums, video conferences and a full face to face conference for teachers have been held across the State this year. The 'discovering democracy' curriculum materials are being trialled across Australia. South Australian teachers have worked closely with this process. South Australia continues its national leadership as a supporter of student voice, particularly in civics matters. A statewide student forum with civics and citizenship as its theme was held at Wayville on 9 and 10 June. Some 250 students were involved in that.

The member for Taylor asked me about the three Acts that were being reviewed. I have been confused before about the TAFE and VEET Acts and I have done it again today. To correct what I said, the TAFE Act is not being reviewed—the VEET Act is being reviewed, mainly because of competition policy requirements. The TAFE Act is a 1975 Act and it might need some changes following the review of the Education Act, particularly in relation to employment and such areas. We may have to go back into the TAFE Act and make some changes, depending on what comes out of the Education Act. The VEET Act is the third one being reviewed. Some of the questions being asked in terms of competition policy requirements are as follows:

- How effective is the present VEET Board and council structure in promoting the achievement of the advisory and operational objectives of the Act?
- Would there be any advantages in adopting a different structural arrangement?
- How should the functions of the State training agency role be allocated?
- How effective is the current arrangement?
- What might be the options for membership of any body or bodies created to carry out the regulation policy advice and strategic planning functions required for South Australia's vocational education and training system?
- How should the provisions of the Act for employment advice relate to the proposed employment council?
- Do you wish to comment on the proposed changes to the Act to implement training packages and new apprenticeships?
- Are provisions in the current Act in relation to industry and community advice appropriate and is there a need for any change in legislation and what options are there?
- Are the strategic planning provisions in the current Act appropriate and is there a need for any change in this area and what changes would be proposed?
- How effectively does the current Act ensure quality of education and training provision, products and services in South Australia?
- Is there a need for any change in any area? What changes would be suggested?
- How effectively does the current legislation promote life-long learning?
- What changes could be made to improve the development of life-long learning?
- Are there any other matters addressed in review of the VEET Act?

They are the focus questions being asked in consultation on that Act.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** I refer to Partnerships 21. There has been a lot of discussion about schools being encouraged to attract private sponsorship. Some questions being asked are: What provisions are being made to assist schools in lower socio-economic regions or those in a less prominent location (some are located on main roads and some in back streets)? What provisions will be made to ensure that schools will not

be financially or socially disadvantaged against those that will be able to attract a greater level of private sponsorship?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** We have not looked at private sponsorship in this area. I was checking on whether any work had been done on it, but we have not done any work in that area. This is an issue which could arise and which schools may have to address. Regarding resourcing, when I gave the ministerial working party on local school management (chaired by Professor Cox) the task of coming up with a model, I said that we wanted to ensure equity through differential resourcing allocations and accountability which included equity standards which recognised, for instance, that schools in lower socioeconomic areas had a reduced ability to raise funds as against schools in higher socioeconomic areas. Schools currently attract funds for educationally disadvantaged groups within their student population. I refer to Aboriginal students, students with disabilities, and students from a low socioeconomic background or rural and remote areas.

Schools and preschools which opt into Partnerships 21 will, as I have said, operate on a global budget which will include differential funding for equity groups. So, what they receive now will not change: that will continue. The current mechanisms will be consolidated to improve flexibility and control over resources at the local level. We want to increase accountability to parents and the community through reports on students' progress and the provision of equity standards under Partnerships 21. I understand what the honourable member is saying, and we are currently looking at that equity issue to ensure that we do not end up with an imbalance in this area. I cannot give the honourable member an answer at the moment, but that work is ongoing.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** So, something will be put in place to ensure that we do not have a lot of money going to one school while others are disadvantaged, because there is concern that that could draw student numbers away.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** That sort of thing is happening already. For instance, last year the Mobil Refinery put \$70 000-odd into the cluster of schools in the Hallett Cove area for computers. So, this does occur even now without Partnerships 21: there is nothing new in terms of industry or businesses getting behind their local school. If the community becomes more involved with the school, it may well be that industry will want to become more involved. There are national ministerial (MCEETYA) guidelines for promotional sponsorship in schools. We will need to follow that up with them before we respond to any further questions. I might add that they are bipartisan.

#### **Membership:**

Mrs Penfold substituted for Mr Condous.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** We have discussed the training that will be provided for schools which choose to opt into Partnerships 21 in the first round but, where schools choose to come in later, will ongoing training be provided for school councillors as council and staffing levels change with people joining and leaving the committee? Where will the training expenses come from? Will provision be made from the general education budget, or will schools be expected to cover future training costs from their budget allocation?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I indicated a couple of weeks ago that \$3.2 million was allocated in the budget for that purpose. Training of school councillors, principals and deputy principals is extremely important. During discussions with

Mr Spring about local management earlier this year, based on his experience in Victoria he said to me, 'When you think you have done enough training, go back and do some more.' It is extremely important for people to understand how this will operate so that they are comfortable with it when they begin. We have allocated \$3.2 million for three years. Those schools which do not opt in during the first year will still have that training money available; it will not have to come out of the school budget.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** An amount of \$3.2 million over three years does not seem much. How much will be allocated to training principals, staff and school councillors?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** It is \$3.2 million per year for three years: so, \$9.6 million will be allocated for training. I cannot give the honourable member the exact breakdown that she requests, but it will be \$3.2 million each year for the next three years. I am advised that that is several times the Victorian allocation in terms of the number of schools in Victoria and the number of schools in South Australia. We will conduct a significantly increased amount of training over and above that which is done in Victoria. Mr Spring advises me that the working party is currently working on the breakdown that the honourable member seeks, and that should be available within the next two weeks.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** It has been said that there could be the option of remuneration for parent participation. Is that the position and, if so, where in the budget is that provided for?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I am not aware of any parent remuneration whatsoever. There is no allocation in the budget, and it is not considered that that would take place. The \$3.2 million will be for the training of school councillors and teachers, but the remuneration of parents has not been considered.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** I was not referring to remunerating parents for training, but some parents have told me that they attended a meeting where it was implied that, as parents participating in Partnerships 21 through the school council, there may be some form of remuneration for them.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** In what respect?

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** For working on the school council and playing a greater role in the management of the school.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Someone might have raised this matter, but the department is not considering it. This could be a decision for schools. Schools have control of their budgets. So, if they decide to remunerate school councillors, that is a decision they can take.

The member for Taylor asked a question earlier about accrual provisions. I will ask Mr Treloar to provide the honourable member with the breakdown of that amount of \$55 million.

**Mr Treloar:** The accrual provision for 1998-99 of \$55.796 million is made up as follows: depreciation on land, property, plant and equipment, \$38.842 million; employee entitlements (long service leave, recreation leave, sick leave, etc.), \$12.546 million; and other balance sheet movements in terms of payables, inventories, borrowings, \$4.408 million—a total of \$55.796 million.

**Ms RANKINE:** In promoting the concept of local school management under Partnerships 21 you have said that educational benefits have to be a priority. The Cox report states quite clearly that all research into similar programs, both interstate and overseas, has shown no evidence that local school management enhances student academic learning outcomes at all. So why are we proceeding with this?



**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** In the centres where I have seen this operating—and a few weeks ago I returned from New Zealand where I saw it in operation—there were educational benefits to children, and they came from the savings that were made at the local management level. Previously bureaucracy had handled all the day-to-day operations, such as our back to school grants and minor maintenance works grants. I will give the member for Wright an example.

Last year I was at Naracoorte. I stand to be corrected, but I think it was Naracoorte Primary School or Naracoorte South Primary School that put in a maintenance works project for the development of an IT centre within the school—an IT room specific for computers. The quote given by the department for the tender was \$70 000. The school council looked at that and said, 'I think we can do it for a lot less money than that', approached the department and asked whether it could take over the management.

As a result of that, because all the tenders that are undertaken for any country location jobs include a 20 per cent loading, the local school went to the local tradespeople and suppliers and was able to complete the job for \$40 000. It pocketed the \$30 000, because that is what the department had allocated towards it, and was then able to refurbish the resource centre as well, so it ended up with a completely new library and a new IT centre, and it painted the school to boot for the \$70 000. The students benefited out of that because they had enhanced learning opportunities and enhanced areas in both their library and the general area for learning.

The policy with respect to any money that is saved by schools—and it is shown everywhere that this can happen—is that they retain 100 per cent. So, they can then use that money in any way they wish. It might be to hire a speech therapist if they think they have problems in that regard, a special needs teacher, a LOTE teacher, more SSO hours or whatever. By having access to those additional funds, they will improve the educational outcomes for their children.

**Ms RANKINE:** As a supplementary question, if I understand your answer to a previous question I put to you, there is actually no formal assessment in place to decide whether or not that is the outcome—whether there are any educational benefits or increased academic learning outcomes. It is basically an economic focus, not an educational focus?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Not at all. Mr Spring is developing strategies in this area, so I will ask him to answer that question.

**Mr Spring:** The question you are asking is an interesting one. In Victoria, for example, student results have improved quite dramatically every year in full population, independent testing. Also, at year 12 level, the percentage of students doing well compared with the non-government schools has doubled in the last five years. In fact, every independent measure of student performance has improved. Parental satisfaction from full population parent surveys of the parents in every school in Victoria indicate 85 per cent satisfaction. Independent surveys on teacher morale goal congruences all show marked improvement over the last four or five years.

The problem with your question is that local management by itself does not do all those things. You have to link local management which provides a framework to staffing flexibility, being able to tailor make your staff to school programs and having the budget flexibility to ensure you get full value for the dollar. Getting the involvement of the community in a partnership with schools creates a framework for better teaching and learning. The key to it all rests in

accountability and the links between local management and curriculum.

Of course, local management, which is management, does not directly affect it but it obviously has an indirect effect if it creates a better platform for teaching and learning. That is why people are going into it. You need to be very careful in interpreting the statement in the Cox report. Improvement in student learning is a multi-variate relationship. You have to take into account a whole range of variables and change all those that influence learning if you are to improve learning. It is fairly well demonstrated if you look at the uptake in the UK, where the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, sends his child to the equivalent of a Partnerships 21 school—they are called Foundation schools. That system has just been introduced in the last three months by the present Queensland Beattie Government. They are all doing it to get this framework and partnership effect so that the teaching and learning program can be better delivered.

**Ms RANKINE:** It has been stated—and I think Mr Spring reiterated this when he visited the Salisbury East High School recently for its AGM—that, if due diligence is shown by a school council, the Government will support it if a problem or disaster occurs. Can the Minister advise the Government's definition of 'due diligence', who determines this, and what avenues will be available to school councils to show they have acted with due diligence if a problem arises or will this matter have to be decided after the event through the courts system?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I am advised by Mr Spring that there is no change to identification regarding school councils under Partnerships 21. School councils may change in size, composition and even name but they will remain incorporated bodies and continue to be indemnified under our current legislation, so there will be no changes.

**Ms RANKINE:** As a supplementary question, if a council blows its budget on some maintenance, for example, if a project goes wrong or if a teacher is engaged for some specialist service and there is a claim against the school, are you saying that the situation will remain as it is? I do not understand why this is highlighted in the Cox report if it is not an issue. The responsibilities of a school council will change, and the Cox report refers to due diligence, so why is there that reference if it has not changed?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** If school councils act sensibly and reasonably, there is no reason why we would not support them. If we are talking about fraud—

**Ms RANKINE:** No.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Well, this is where we are talking about due diligence. Where you are doing a due diligence report, you are looking in terms of accountability at how that money has been spent. That is why it is highlighted. If schools have acted responsibly and reasonably, there is no reason why the department would not continue to support them, but if in a due diligence assessment of the accounts of a school or the operations of a school council fraud was detected, for instance, obviously that is a different situation.

#### **Membership:**

The Hon. M.D. Rann substituted for Ms White.

**Ms RANKINE:** What measures will be put in place to ensure competition between schools does not occur as a result of local school management? Can the Minister guarantee that effective and innovative programs that would be of benefit

to students across the State will continue to be shared, bearing in mind that funds are enrolment sensitive?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** To the latter part of the question the answer is, 'Yes, they will be.' In terms of competition between the schools, it is an issue that has been raised with me, particularly in terms of membership of school councils. For instance, I think the honourable member would be surprised at the accessibility of certain schools to have expertise and the level of expertise that they are able to lock into on their school councils, and I instance certain schools in remote, rural areas or in lower socioeconomic areas. I was at Smithfield Plains Junior Primary School only a couple of weeks ago to reopen a building that had been destroyed by fire. I said to the Principal, who has been there for six years, 'What are your thoughts about Partnerships 21?'

I guess my expectation was that she might be perhaps a little fearful of it, given the socioeconomic status of the area, but she indicated that they could not wait to get into it. She said, 'When I first came to this school I could not get a quorum for the school council.' She then added, 'I sat down with the parents and we all looked at each other and I said, "Well, it is your school, so we had better start talking."' She ended up running programs of development for her school council. On the day that I reopened the building that was destroyed by fire, about 40 to 50 parents attended and were all as keen as mustard about their school. I commend the Principal and the parents of Smithfield Plains Junior Primary because they have a fantastic feeling for that school. They want to be involved; they want the best for their children; they want to develop the school; and, as I said, they cannot wait to get involved in Partnerships 21 because they see real benefits.

I do not believe that there is anything wrong with competition. That is a very healthy factor and it will not change. It is in every part of our community now: it will not change with the introduction of Partnerships 21. Many schools are already looking at collaborative arrangements. For instance, they may well work in a cluster rather than working as a single school. By clustering they will be able to pool their budgets and pool their resources in terms of school councillors and expertise on those school councils and then be able to work, as they see it, in a much better way. So that competition, so to speak, is within a cluster and it makes them much stronger as a cluster rather than as a single school.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** Following on from what the Minister was saying about schools being able to work in a cluster, which obviously will be to the advantage of some schools, the Minister was saying that they will be able to pool their budget. Does that mean that they will be able to pool their budget for things such as a maintenance program or a particular educational program? What if one school council was very strong and dominant and was able to have a little more of the resources than one that was perhaps not quite so forceful?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** That is an issue at which they would have to look when they entered into that cluster. The best clusters would probably be schools of equal size and with similar budgets as against one strong school and a couple of much smaller schools. However, that is an issue they would have to examine on entering into that agreement to cluster. The school council would have to look at that and ask: 'Will we be swamped by this bigger school or this stronger school council and therefore, at times, be overridden on decisions made about our school?' Obviously, that is an

issue that each school council would have to address if it considered going into a cluster.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** Would there be any guidelines in the case that everyone looked as though they were on an equal partnership to begin with but then found some problems occurring? Would there be some guidelines or would the department have something in place where the council feeling disadvantaged could go to seek advice?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Certainly the department will be working with school councils and/or with clusters of schools, or whatever occurs, over the next couple years. Where problems occur such as the honourable member is hypothesizing, we will be looking to iron out the wrinkles, so to speak, and work with the schools to overcome those sorts of problems.

**Mrs GERAGHTY:** I accept that, in the first few years, these things will need to be worked out, but will the Minister consider putting something in place for the future so that someone is keeping an eye on the situation?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Certainly the department would be keeping a close eye on that type of situation. If it recurred over and over, I would imagine that we would be looking to put in some guidelines for school councils, but it is the school councils' choice. They enter into these clusters or agreements with their eyes wide open, but obviously we would be looking to work hand in hand with them and support them on the way through.

#### **Membership:**

Ms Key substituted for Ms Rankine.

#### **Additional Witness:**

The Hon. M.K. Brindal, Minister for Employment, Minister for Youth.

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

Ms J. Taylor, Executive Director, Employment and Youth.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Questions can now be asked on the subjects of Employment and Youth and I presume also the current line. Does the Minister wish to make any opening comments before we begin?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I would with the concurrence of the Committee, Mr Chairman. As Minister for Employment and Minister for Youth my portfolios deal with two of the most pressing issues facing South Australians. Although employment is the main issue for young people, the issues facing them are about more than that. Similarly, employment is about employment for all South Australians and not just about young people, although the Government has taken as a priority in the past 12 months specifically and even before that youth unemployment. Since I took over as Minister for Youth, over the past nine months I have become increasingly aware of the complexities facing young people in today's society. I have had the opportunity to talk directly with a large number of young people and to hear from them regarding their concerns.

During the jobs workshops, to which I will refer later, a number of young people raised issues with me that related not only to employment but also to improving the range of opportunities available to them. What they and other young people have spoken to me about is ways to create growth and development for this State which benefits not only them but all South Australians. I have also been fortunate in having the opportunity to join with young people in celebrating their

achievements and the achievements of others in the Youth area. Youth Week and the Youth Media Awards are two good examples of the work the Government does in encouraging a positive image for our youth.

Similarly, the Government is pleased to encourage the development of young people through programs such as the Youth Leadership Grants and the Youth Parliament. The Government is pleased to be able to continue funding for these programs for the next year. The Government is also keen to encourage the participation of young South Australians in the development of this State and Government policy that affects them. Accordingly, the Government is determined to build strong links with the youth of this State via strategies which will give each young South Australian a say. We as a Government are committed to a belief that young people are as important a component of this State as anyone else, that they need to be listened to and heard and that they need an increasing voice in the Government of this State which, after all, affects all South Australians.

On the employment front, the community, business and Government have identified employment as a first priority. Increasing the number of jobs in South Australia has been a fundamental of the Government's focus on economic development initiatives. The Premier's 1999 employment statement, following largely on the foundation built by the 1998 employment statement, is the culmination of an enormous amount of work. The document itself not only represents an exciting new package of employment and training initiatives but also sets the framework for Government employment efforts for the years to come. We now have a solid base from which to tackle unemployment and the preparation of people for the work force. The Government will continue to work towards improving the employment prospects of job seekers by addressing both supply and demand issues. The former will focus on improving the employability of people and the latter will involve a determined effort to create more jobs.

As I have said in the past, the Government alone cannot create jobs for all who require them. It requires a concerted effort by business, governments and the community. That is why the employment statement promotes a collaborative approach to employment and why the document itself was born from an extensive consultation process. The Government has performed well against the 1998 employment statement, with over 9 000 jobs created during 1998-99, of which 3 500 positions were generated through the statement's new programs. This compares very favourably with the two year target of 4 500 for the new programs.

The State's unemployment figures over this financial year have also shown that State Government policies are starting to have an effect on the rate of unemployment in this State. The ABS figures recently released for the month of May saw the eleventh consecutive month of trend employment increase. In fact, 468 000 South Australians were engaged in full-time employment. When the Opposition Leader was Minister for Employment that figure was 467 600. Furthermore, total employment in 1993 was 634 500 and it is now 654 500.

There are 20 000 more jobs today than when the Australian Labor Party was in office. Under Labor between 1990 and 1992 this State lost 38 300 jobs, and the rate of unemployment was 12 per cent. This Government's unemployment policy has directly created 9 000 real jobs, and the rate of unemployment is now 8.9 per cent.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** You seem a little nervous; just pipe down and be calm.

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I apologise to the Leader of the Opposition if he mistakes my head cold for nerves. I assure him that the last time I was nervous of him was the first day I entered this Parliament.

*Members interjecting:*

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order! The Minister must not retaliate.

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** The Minister is tempted. This Government is delivering real jobs, whereas the Opposition continues to deliver nothing in the area of employment policy but hot air. The development of the 1999 employment statement began in earnest on 19 October 1998, with the Premier's announcement that the Government would seek input on job creation through a series of public forums around this State. These forums—the jobs workshops—were conducted in October and November of last year. The 22 regional workshops in addition to written submissions, web site hits and youth workshops provided a valuable resource for the State Government as it sought to prepare a package of policies and programs that would address real unemployment issues.

The consultative process continued, with key issues emerging through the jobs workshops being considered by the Premier's Partnerships for Jobs Forum. This group, comprising representatives from peak industry, community and union organisations, contributed to the identification of the State Government strategy for employment. Further input came via the Parliament on 10 February 1999 and the recommendations of the Regional Development Task Force, although the full implications of the task force report are still being worked through.

I pay tribute to all the members of Parliament who participated in the debate not only in the Chamber but also by going out and taking part in the forums and listening to what all South Australians, including unemployed South Australians, had to say. I acknowledge that representatives of the Parliament attended from all sides of this House, not just from the Government side.

As people would be aware, the 1999 employment statement heralded the introduction of a range of new initiatives and supported the expansion of successful schemes worth over \$28.5 million for the three years for which they will be allocated. This allocation is in addition to the \$100 million committed for a three year period in the 1998 employment statement. The new programs will result in the placement of an additional 7 400 people in employment and training positions. These are real jobs, employment traineeships and apprenticeships; they are not artificial placements or short-term training schemes.

The new package responds to the key issues raised in the jobs workshops consultation process and provides a transparent framework for Government action in the employment field. The framework identifies assisting development, regions, business and people as the critical areas for Government activity. The State Government also recognises the important role played by the Commonwealth Government, local government, industry and the community. Accordingly, the State Government will seek to strengthen partnerships with key organisations and representatives of these areas.

Given that the employment statement is an extensive package of programs I do not intend to discuss them all now. However, I would like to make people aware of some of the new and expanded initiatives funded in the package and the

opportunities we expect them to create. An additional 1 000 traineeships and apprenticeship positions—

*The Hon. M.D. Rann interjecting:*

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** The video was not quite as long as this statement. An additional 1 000 traineeships and apprenticeship positions will be supported through the Small Business Employment Incentive Scheme. This scheme has been one of the most successful employment programs introduced in South Australia in recent years. Small businesses receive up to \$4 000 over two years in incentive payments for employing a trainee or apprentice. Since its introduction in January 1998 the scheme has facilitated the employment of 3 229 trainees and apprentices. The original target was 2 500, but the demand for the project has exceeded expectations.

An additional \$4 million is committed over the next three years, with the aim of placing 1 000 trainees and apprentices with small business. An additional 600 trainees will be engaged in the State public sector over the next three years. This is in addition to the State Government's Youth Training Scheme planned for the 1999-2000 intake of 1 200, and the recruitment of 1 200 who have been placed over the 1998-99 financial year.

This is an excellent opportunity for an extra 600 young South Australians to complete a valuable 12 month placement with a Government agency in South Australia. Government traineeships have proven to be a successful entry point into the work force for many young people, and about 70 per cent of participants secure employment in the public or private sectors as a result of their traineeship in full time employment. An additional 900 graduates will be recruited to the State Government over the next three years. The State Government's graduate intake is an important element in Public Service succession planning. The new annual intake of 300 graduates is in addition to the 200 graduates placed annually as a result of the 1998 employment statement. The Government is committed to recruiting some of the highest quality young people South Australia has to offer.

The Mature Age Employer Incentive Scheme will facilitate the employment of over 2 000 job seekers aged 40 years and over during the next three years. I hope members of the Opposition will listen carefully to this scheme: they may want to avail themselves of it in the future. The success of the Small Business Employer Incentive Scheme has encouraged the Government to implement a similar incentive payment scheme for mature age job seekers. Businesses will receive up to \$2 000 to employ a mature age job seeker for a minimum of 20 hours per week for 26 weeks. The scheme is worth \$4 million to businesses over the next three years. A package of mature age support programs will provide training, advice and employer awareness—

*Members interjecting:*

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** This is a key issue for us. A package of mature age support programs will provide training, advice and employer awareness raising programs to assist mature aged people to obtain employment. Again, in recognition of specific issues facing job seekers aged 40 years and over, the Government has committed around \$2 million over three years to provide skills training grants, an employer awareness campaign and labour market information forums. The package will assist over 2 500 unemployed people and represents a comprehensive program response to mature aged unemployment.

Aquaculture is a business development program and will assist in establishing and expanding non-tuna aquaculture

businesses in regions throughout the State. The links between business growth and employment growth is well documented. Within Government this means that it is important for the Department of Education, Training and Employment and the Department of Industry and Trade to collaborate on the strategic use of resources to maximise benefits to both areas. I note that the member for Flinders is a member of this Committee, and she would be aware that one of the highlights of the aquaculture industry is that the placement of many of the traineeships is directly into regional South Australia, and we see it as a real plus for not only her electorate but also other country electorates—a way to revitalise the regions of South Australia.

The two departments are currently working together on the implementation of the \$800 000 aquaculture business development program. The program will enable new businesses to set up and existing businesses to expand in the marine freshwater aquaculture industries. It will provide funding to businesses facing difficulties in meeting the high capital costs associated with the industry. The program will focus on the potential for businesses to expand their work force as a result of their participation.

The Human Resource Advisory Service, due to finish at the end of 1998-99, will continue and assist about 1 000 businesses over the next two years. The Human Resource Advisory Service, which was introduced in the 1998 employment statement, will continue to subsidise valuable human resource consultancy services for business with an annual payroll of less than \$700 000. The 1998-99 target of assisting 470 businesses has been exceeded and a recent review of the program indicated that it had contributed to the creation of 290 new jobs during this period. The Government is committed to assisting businesses with issues such as performance management; designing job specifications; occupational health, safety and welfare; and enterprise agreements. This commitment has resulted in the allocation of \$400 000 for each of the next two years.

In summary, the State Government is proud of the 1999 employment statement but recognises that a great deal of work lies ahead in ensuring the policies and programs contained within it to achieve the best possible outcomes for all the people of South Australia. The employment statement is a concrete commitment to generating more jobs and one for which the Government expects to be held accountable. The outcomes of 1998 employment showed that the Government is on the right track and that some of our efforts, in collaboration with industry and the community, are starting to be rewarded. The reduction in the unemployment rate for South Australia from 10.4 per cent in May 1998 to the current 8.9 per cent is evidence of this. But, there is still work to be done, particularly as our rate remains above the national average.

**The Hon. R.B. SUCH:** Following the jobs workshops, will the Minister outline the role that the Employment Council will take in terms of enhancing job opportunities for South Australians?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I would like to thank the member—

*Members interjecting:*

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order! The Committee will come to order.

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I am surprised that the Leader of the Opposition wants to kneel to the member for Fisher: *Hansard* should record it. I acknowledge that the member for

Fisher has previously been a Minister for Youth and Employment.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** And a good one.

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** The member says 'a good one': he was an exceptionally good Minister whose dedication to the job and task he was set has never been in doubt or questioned by anyone with whom I have come into contact. I acknowledge that attribute in the member for Fisher. I think his work—

*Members interjecting:*

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order!

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** —and Minister Hall's and Ministers Kotz's work, has helped to attribute the position in which the Government now finds itself—still a long way to go but in a less onerous position than when it first came to office.

The Employment Council, which will begin work shortly, will bring greater coordination to the Government's economic development, employment, education and training activities. It will give better coordination of Government services (and was perhaps the single most important issue to emerge through the jobs workshops) and the Government is confident that the peak level Employment Council will deliver improved outcomes and service standard. The council, which comprises key State Government, industry, union and community representatives, will set key strategic directions for Government and will enhance the effectiveness of existing employment activities. It will build on the work of the Premier's Partnership for Jobs forum. I have the names of the 17 members of the Employment Council which have been released today. I will not read them, but with members' concurrence I would like them incorporated in *Hansard*.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Does it meet the usual criteria of being not more than one page?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** Yes.

#### Employment Council

The Employment Council comprises: the Minister for Employment; the Minister for Education, Children's Services and Training; the Minister for Government Services and for Information Technology; the Minister for Industry and Trade; Mr Lloyd Groves, Managing Director, Vision Systems; Mr Tim James, BRL Hardy; Ms Jan McNaught, member of Flavour SA; Professor Mary O'Kane, Vice Chancellor, Adelaide University; Ms Stella Alexander, founder, Direct Personnel; Mr Ron Wickett, Minelab Electronics; Ms Pam Simmons, Executive Director, SACOSS; the Chief Exec. of the SA Employer's Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Mr Chris White, Secretary to the UTLC; Mr Leigh Davis, MLC; Mr Chris Moriarty, Managing Director, Moriarty Plastics; Ms Susan Chase, Managing Director, Cowell Electric Supply Co. and the Chair of the Youth Plus Advisory Council.

The Employment Council will provide advice to the Government on measures to increase employment and reduce unemployment in this State; the effectiveness of Commonwealth-State and local government economic development for employment and training; long-term work force planning strategies; and measures to enhance the employability of people seeking work. The council is based on the successful Food for the Future model. It will be supported by a senior officials committee, chaired by the Chief Executive of the Department of Education, Training and Employment, Mr Geoff Spring.

One of the key roles will be to monitor the outcomes of the employment statement and advise on opportunities to enhance their effectiveness. In addition, the council will provide strategic advice on matching Government programs

to industry needs, including the needs of emerging industries and regional areas.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** I have a block of questions to put on notice. We have had about half an hour of introduction—and I know why. On 14 January this year, the Minister issued a media release announcing 1 000 new South Australian youth jobs. The release stated that the positions will be in addition to the 2 400 public sector traineeship places announced by the State Government in the \$100 million employment statement last year. Meanwhile, the number of unemployed young people in South Australia seeking full-time work rose to 7 600 last month. Without the usual political carry-on, could we get straight answers to straight questions. What are the details of the 1 000 new jobs to be provided over the next two years; how many have been filled to date; and in what industries and occupations?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** So that I do not fall into the trap of misleading the Committee, the media release at that time concerned some reallocation of Commonwealth moneys which allowed us, working in concert with the Commonwealth, to create new jobs, but I will undertake to get the details of the media release, cross check with what it was about, and give the member a considered answer.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** I want a detailed breakdown of costings for the initiative. I want to know whether the State Government will be providing anything in addition to the \$3 million in Commonwealth funding, given the great hoo-ha in terms of the announcement. We know always to look at the figures behind these announcements. So, could you let us know whether they are so-called real jobs or prevocational training places which may or may not lead to real training places?

Last year the former Minister for Employment, Joan Hall, told the Estimates Committee that the evaluation of the training and employment initiatives funded under the 1996-97 youth employment statement would be received as a final report at the end of June 1998. That was the promise made in last year's Estimates. Will the Minister release for public scrutiny the detailed outcomes of that independent evaluation, given that it was promised in last year's Estimates by the Minister's friend and colleague?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I will take that matter on notice and supply a considered answer.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** The 1999-2000 employment statement notes the expansion of the Small Business Employer Incentive Scheme and the funding of an additional 1 000 trainees and apprentices in small business. What was the Government's expenditure for the SBEIS (that is not the former scheme but the new scheme) in 1997-98? How many placements were provided in the two categories of trainees and apprentices for 1997-98?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** It is normal for a Minister to come into Estimates prepared with the figures for the last year. I have figures for 1999-2000, but I do not have in front of me the 1997-98 figures. Again, however, I will make sure that they are obtained and will supply them to the Leader.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** It looks as though everything will be taken on notice, but how will the Government—

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** If you want to question the genesis of the *Bible*, it has to be taken on notice. I have last year's figures and I have next year's figures: I do not have a historical record.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** There used to be days when Ministers used to waive their dorothy dixers because they had confidence in their own ability, but we did not need training

schemes, either, to appear before Estimates. Has there been any revision in last year's estimate to the total of \$10 million in incentive payments that will be made to small business in the years to 2000? How will the Government re-allocate any savings from the projected outlays to improve employment and training opportunities for young South Australians?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** The assistance allocated last year for employers consisted of two components: \$4 350 000 for the Small Business Employer Incentive Scheme; \$240 000 for the Self Starter Scheme; and for the Human Resource Advisory Service, \$400 000. Those allocations for the 1999-2000 budget are: \$4 150 000 for the SBEIS, \$240 000 for the Self Starter Scheme (the same as last year) and \$400 000 for the HRAS (the same as last year).

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** My question was: has there been any revision of last year's estimate that a total of \$10 million in incentive payments will be made to small business to the year 2000? I am going on last year's estimates, which is obviously the appropriate thing to do.

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I am informed that those estimates were correct for last year. Some additional money was also put in last year. I believe that the outcome achieved was better than \$10 million, but I will provide the figures for the Leader if he so wishes.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** In the 1998-99 employment statement the Premier announced initiatives worth \$100 million over two years. The 1999-2000 employment statement refers to the 'four year \$100 million package of initiatives announced in last year's statement'. The Government went on to announce:

...new spending and extensions to programs worth \$28.5 million over the next three years [which] aim to provide a further 7 400 people with a job and training opportunities.

Will the Minister explain the discrepancy between the two and four year time lines for its \$100 million jobs statement? In which statement did you give the public the correct information?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I would presume that in all the statements the correct information is given. The Leader highlights what he sees as an anomaly. I will attempt to provide him with a cogent answer to that anomaly. In answer to the Leader's assertion about what I did, I made none of those statements. So, I will have to research it and give him a considered answer.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** There is no need to be testy.

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I am not being testy: I object to the Leader's maligning people who are not here.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** The fact is that there is a four year \$100 million package, and then a three year \$28 million package is announced. It is quite normal to ask, 'What is the discrepancy?'

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** The \$28.5 million package over the next three years is in addition to the four year \$100 million package that was announced.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** Will the Minister give a breakdown of the \$28.5 million in new spending announced in this year's budget, and where is this so-called new money to be spent?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** It is all detailed on page 11 of the employment statement. I will go through in detail the following: the 1999 employment statement continues to focus on the 1998 statement to maximise the level of employment in South Australia. It involves new spending and extension to programs valued at \$28.5 million over the period 1999-2000 to 2001-2 to provide a further 7 400 people with

jobs and training opportunities. The activities in the 1999 employment statement have been identified as a result of active consultation by the Government through the Jobs Workshop Regional Development Task Force, input through the Premier's Partnership for Jobs Forum and the independent reviews of existing programs.

In the 1999 employment statement the Government has taken a strategic and structured approach to job creation. We have actually looked at what we did last year, tried to assess the programs that worked best and have built upon those programs; in fact, we will probably, with mature reflection, wind down some of those programs that were not as successful in meeting their targets. The employment framework for implementation of the programs and initiatives of the employment statement reflects the Government's broader initiatives as well as its primary objectives within the employment field through, as I said in my opening statement, assisting development, regions, business and people. Of particular significance in the 1999 statement is a recognition by Government of the need to increase assistance for the mature aged unemployed. I put up front \$4 million as part of this \$28.5 million over the next three years. That was a new scheme. Additional money has been added to the Small Business Incentive Scheme and to targeting off specific industry sectors.

In the 1998 employment statement there were 13 programs designed to enhance employment opportunities for South Australians. They were designated as initiatives worth almost \$100 million, and they were also targeted to create 4 500 jobs over a two year period. To date, more than 4 000 businesses and over 8 500 people have gained employment through the employment initiative statement, which I think everyone can understand by simple mathematics is well ahead of what we had hoped. In February 1999 all employment programs announced as part of the 1998 statement were independently reviewed. The reviews found that major changes had taken place in labour market programs as a result of the adoption of a contractual purchaser-provider model of implementation. This has resulted in the closer integration of employment with business development activities to create sustainable jobs. Whilst the programs were found to be meeting stated aims and targets, we believe that their relevance warrants continual refinement. These will be addressed as part of the process of continuing improvement.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** The Minister will be aware of the term 'growth gap'. We have international recessions, national recessions, improvements and downturns. Basically, what we look at is where South Australia stands in terms of the growth gap as a national average between us and the rest of the nation. Certainly, the Premier is aware of the growth gap, because he said at the 1997 election and subsequently that the Government's stated policy settings are specifically aimed at reducing to zero by the year 2000 the growth gap between us and the rest of the country. Indeed, it is not only in terms of economic growth because there is a specific promise to bring down the rate of unemployment in South Australia to the national rate by the end of this year. Since that promise was made in 1997, the gap is as wide as ever. It is currently standing at 8.9 per cent compared with 7.5 per cent nationally. Does the promise of bringing down unemployment to the national average by the year 2000 still stand, and can it be fulfilled under the present policy settings and budget commitments of this Government as announced in this budget?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** The short answer is 'Yes', but the much longer answer, which this Committee deserves to hear, are Mr Rann's words from *Hansard* of last year:

Today South Australia's unemployment rate is 10.4 per cent compared with a national rate of 8.1 per cent.

I remind the honourable member that that was a gap last year of 2.3 per cent.

*The Hon. M.D. Rann interjecting:*

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** You asked the question—I'll give the answer, if you don't mind. Last year the Leader sat in this Committee and asked much the same question. He said that the gap then was a 'whopping' 2.3 per cent. He said:

People will remember that we were promised 20 000 jobs per year. The number of jobs has shrunk by 1 100 and this compares with national job growth over the same period of 779 200 or 10 per cent.

The Leader further stated:

The Government has lost South Australians a whopping 5 600 jobs, which is a fall of 3.8 per cent and that is over 2 300 jobs per month.

They were the Leader's comments last year.

*The Hon. M.D. Rann interjecting:*

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order! The Leader is out of order.

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I know, but I want to explain why what you said last year was wrong and why we are getting there.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** Surely you are not saying that the ABS statistics are wrong.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order! The Leader is out of order.

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** We are now putting last year's figures into the context of this year's figures, along with some past history. In 1993 full-time employment averaged 467 600 in South Australia. In 1997 full-time employment averaged 46 600, representing a fall of 1 000 or .2 per cent when compared with the 1993 figure. The five months to May 1999 showed average full-time employment standing at 468 300. This is 700 jobs or .1 per cent higher than the 1993 figure and 1 700 jobs or .4 per cent higher than the 1997 figure. Nationally full-time employment has grown by 539 200 jobs or 9.2 per cent between 1993 and 1999. Part-time employment, currently averaging 186 200 jobs for 1999, is 19 300 or 11.6 per cent higher than the 1993 figure, but it is 4 100 or 2.2 per cent lower than the 1997 figure. I do not mind that as I would rather have more full-time jobs and fewer part-time jobs, and everyone would probably agree.

Nationally part-time employment has grown by 447 100 jobs or 24.8 per cent between 1993 and 1999. Total employment is currently 654 500, and that is 20 000 or 3.2 per cent higher than the 1993 figure, but it is 2 400 or .4 per cent lower than the 1997 figure. Nationally total employment has grown by 986 200 jobs, that is, 12.8 per cent, between 1993 and 1999. I have a comparison of full-time, part-time and total employment for the years 1993, 1997 and 1999 for the State of South Australia—original data in a tabulated form—and wish to have it inserted in *Hansard* without my reading it.

Comparison of Full-time, Part-time and Total Employment  
1993, 1997 and 1999

	South Australia (Original Data)		
	Full-time	Part-time	Total
1993	467 600	166 900	634 500
1997	466 600	190 300	656 900
1999	468 300	186 200	654 500

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** That simply means that the Government is trying to achieve a simple goal of full-time employment for every South Australian seeking it.

*The Hon. M.D. Rann interjecting:*

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order!

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** We are working to achieve full-time employment for all South Australians who are seeking to be employed. We would like to be at that national average by next year. We would like to be there even more quickly if we can. We are aiming to do that, but it is an aim. It is a goal that we set and are trying to struggle towards, but it is only one step along the way. The long-term future is to create full-time sustainable jobs. Perhaps we will reach our goal within that time frame, perhaps we will lag behind or perhaps we will achieve it more quickly—who knows? There is one goal and one goal alone.

**Mr SCALZI:** A lot has been made of the South Australian unemployment rate being higher than the national average. Will the Minister give some detail about the difference in South Australia's unemployment rate compared with the national average in the past 10 or 15 years? Has this gap just arisen under the present Government or did it exist before?

*The Hon. M.D. Rann interjecting:*

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order! The Leader is out of order.

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** The gap has varied. South Australia has had a difficult position relative to other mainland States for a number of years. I would dearly love to come into this Committee and say that our figures are now better than Queensland. We have got close a couple times in the past month but we have never done quite well enough. Compared with the national average we have had problems for many years and not just—

**Mr SCALZI:** Even under a Labor Government?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** Yes. Every member of this Committee would acknowledge that it is not a partisan political problem but a real problem for the whole of the South Australian community.

*The Hon. M.D. Rann interjecting:*

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I know that, but I make that comment. We had a prosperous State which, until the war, was built on agrarian agriculture and minerals, and that served us quite well. Sir Thomas Playford came along and modernised this State and created a solid industrial base. That was a valid policy for the time. With the changing world the regional economies most affected—and Glasgow is a good example—were those we created for ourselves in the post-war period. Our success in the post-war period was one of the factors that has seen us more harshly treated by this readjusting of the world economic climate. Because South Australia has had it tougher in the past few years our base is more solid. We have an exceptional work force.

We have very talented people in this State, people who are constantly poached to run national offices. If you can succeed in South Australia in this climate you can succeed just about anywhere. We have an intelligent, stable and well educated work force and a very solid base. There is only one way and that is forward. I do not see it—and the Leader acknowledges this—as a Party political matter. The problem has been around for the better part of a decade, and it is a profound problem. Who sits on the Government benches will not change the complexity of the problem, but I hope who ever sits on the Government benches will continue to work on the problem.

Our strategy, and it is important, is to sit down and work with everyone. We do not say simply that the Government can solve this. We say that the Government can help through processes such as lifelong learning. The Government can create a climate and then it can work with the United Trades and Labor Council, with the Opposition, the community, employers and employees, because it is only together that we will get a solution.

*Ms Key interjecting:*

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** The honourable member says that it is not a workshop. If this Parliament were more of a workshop and less of a talkfest the people of South Australia would be grateful.

**Mr SCALZI:** I refer the Minister to Budget Paper 4, Volume 2 (page 8.7) and specifically to the item relating to the significant increase in the number of people commencing contracts of training in South Australia in the past two years. This item mentions specifically the role of Commonwealth incentive payments, but what action has the State Government taken to facilitate this growth?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** Although the Commonwealth Government should be congratulated on its efforts to provide training and apprentice opportunities throughout Australia, the South Australian Government has provided significant impetus by increasing contract of training commencements in this State, particularly in priority areas such as small business. An increase of 119.6 per cent was recorded for commencements in the calendar year 1998 over the 1997 figures. In total, 17 878 apprentices and trainees commenced contracts of training in 1998 compared with 8 142 in 1997.

The Small Business Employer Incentive Scheme (SBEIS), which provides a financial incentive to small businesses of up to \$4 000 to engage a trainee or an apprentice, has been well received by South Australian businesses. Since its introduction in January 1998, the SBEIS has facilitated the placement of 3 229 trainees and apprentices. In recognition of the effectiveness of the SBEIS, the State Government announced as part of the recent State budget a funding boost to the program of \$4 million over the next three years. This funding will facilitate the placement of an additional 1 000 trainees and apprentices during 1999-2000, and we hope that some of that funding will be specifically targeted towards regional and country small businesses in South Australia.

The State Government has also sought to promote traineeships and apprenticeships in outsourced Government contracts through Upskill SA. Upskill SA is a cooperative arrangement between State Government agencies and private sector contractors which aims to increase the formal training opportunities for young people. Upskill SA requires that all State Government contracts with an estimated value of \$500 000 as well as some contracts between \$100 000 and \$500 000 devote 10 per cent of the total labour hours to trainees and apprentices. The recent Upskill biennial progress report for the period April to September 1998 highlighted that a total of 55 contracts incorporated the Upskill requirement.

The State Government's direct contribution as an employer of apprentices and trainees is also worth noting. The 1998 employment statement has over the past 12 months resulted in the recruitment of 1 200 young people into the public sector through the State Government Youth Training Scheme. This program will also result in a further 1 200 trainees being placed in the coming 12 months. The latest intakes build on the 4 600 already engaged since January 1994. Furthermore, the Government's regional apprenticeship support program, which centrally recruits apprentices for State Government

agencies across the State, has placed 367 young people since January 1994.

In 1999, 'Real Jobs—Real Future', a comprehensive program, was conducted to promote apprenticeships as a potential job choice with a future that works. Television, radio and press advertising and a mail-out to teachers, parents and students were combined with the innovative use of the web site competition to enhance the image of apprenticeships in traditional trade areas.

**Mrs PENFOLD:** The Minister mentioned the aquaculture industry as one of the fastest growing industries in the State. Will he provide details on how the State Government supports this industry on Eyre Peninsula?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** No member of this Committee would doubt the honourable member's commitment not only to the growth of the aquaculture industry but to any industry of any type that she can encourage to thrive and prosper on Eyre Peninsula, particularly in the State seat of Flinders.

Through KickStart and other Employment SA funded programs over the past four years, the Eyre Regional Development Board has assisted a variety of offshore and onshore aquaculture businesses. Between \$30 000 and \$40 000 has consistently been spent each year for the past four years on various aquaculture projects. I am sure that the honourable member knows these, but I will detail them for the other members of the Committee. They are: diver training, feasibility studies, seafood handling workshops, tuna farm workshops, and coxswain's licence training.

The South Australian Government has also assisted aquaculture development in other areas. The South Australian Mussel Growers Association has been funded under the regional industry training and employment program with \$45 000 to help with skills development and networking. Further funding from PIRSA and the Federal Government (a total of \$150 000) has resulted in the development of aquaculture manuals to help potential aquaculture businesses at various stages of development. PIRSA has also provided traineeships in the area.

The South Australian Oyster Growers Association has received State Government funding to undertake a strategic plan, a marketing plan and a feasibility study into the oyster industry which, as the honourable member knows, has direct application to a large number of licences, I hope by now, on Eyre Peninsula. Perhaps it is not as large a number as we would like, but I think the Government is working on increasing that number daily.

The Eyre region's contract for employment program in 1999-2000 also reflects the board's aquaculture priorities and related industries beyond the farming of fish to support the tuna industry and other fish harvesting and processing activities. Under this contract, a total of \$184 000 is being provided to the board, of which a considerable amount will be directed to fish related employment.

I conclude by saying that on top of all that are the traineeships which I have not covered but which are proving to be invaluable. Many aspects of the aquaculture industry are in a start-up form, so we are unable to employ people who are already trained. The ability to get people and train them on the job so that they can develop these skills as the industry develops is proving to be absolutely invaluable, and I hope that it is one of the ways ahead for regional South Australia.

As the honourable member would know, in her area we have had the greatest production of wheat per hectare than has ever been obtained in the past, and it has been done more efficiently with fewer people. This means that there are not



as many people who can get sustainable employment in many areas of country South Australia. Aquaculture presents a brand new opportunity where people can grow up and elect to remain in country and regional South Australia producing high value goods and having an enjoyable country lifestyle. Many people shift to the city not because they want to but simply because they cannot find work in the country. Aquaculture is one of the ways ahead. I know that the member for Flinders is totally enthusiastic about this industry, and I share her enthusiasm.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** I think it is important for all of us in a bipartisan way to recognise that the economic growth rate is the key in terms of underpinning what is likely to happen on the employment front. The latest State accounts show South Australia as having the second worst economic growth rate in the country for the year to March 1999. The growth that we have has come largely from household consumption expenditure with private new capital investment crashing in the 12 months to March by more than 30 per cent, which is the worst fall in any State in the nation.

So, I think it is important to keep that in mind and to question some of the economic assumptions underlying the budget tables in an effort to achieve what we all want to achieve, that is, economic and employment growth. One of the things of which I have been convinced for some time is that it is important that the employment portfolio be located under the Premier. If the most important issue facing South Australia is unemployment—or, more importantly, employment—it should not be just the responsibility of a senior Minister of the Cabinet (inside and not outside the Cabinet) but also a jobs and economic development commission should report directly to the Premier so that the buck stops with the Premier, not with someone who does not—and this is no reflection on the Minister, who I can see is keen—

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN (Hon. R.B. Such):** The Leader should ask his question.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** I am just trying to match the half hour of everybody.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** The Committee has been very tolerant.

**The Hon. M.D. RANN:** It is really important for both actual and symbolic reasons for the buck to stop with the Premier and for the Premier to be directly ministerially responsible for the employment portfolio, and if not, at least a senior Minister in the Cabinet. As I understand it, the Minister chairs the Employment Council. Can you explain its current role?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** Yes, but before I do, I would like to answer what the Leader has said, because he has said it before. Every person in this Government is answerable to the Premier. The Premier is captain of the ship. The Premier directs the ship, and every Minister—

*The Hon. M.D. Rann interjecting:*

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** Well, the Leader—

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Order! The Minister is responding.

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** The Leader says that somehow my presence in Cabinet is a determinant factor. I can assure the Leader that when I have a problem, when I have something that I need to discuss, I have absolute access to the Premier, as does every Minister. We work as a team. The fact that some members of the team attend to the Cabinet business more often than I do is irrelevant. It is the access to all the machinery of government that is important.

*The Hon. M.D. Rann interjecting:*

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I would say to the Leader, with due deference, it would be good to get beyond all these sorts of trappings—who is senior, therefore they have to have this portfolio or that portfolio. It is about effectiveness. The Premier has separated this portfolio for very good reasons. The Premier is Premier of South Australia. His attention is constantly directed to a multitude of issues. The Leader would know, in absolute fairness because he has been a Minister, that this issue requires almost constant and undivided attention.

It would not be fair for the Premier to have given himself the Employment portfolio because perhaps the Premier believes that he could not, with all his other duties, give it the attention that it deserves. Therefore, quite rightly, if that was his thinking, he would delegate that responsibility to another Minister, entrusting that other Minister with that responsibility on his behalf.

*The Hon. M.D. Rann interjecting:*

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** Yes, it is about clout. The Premier has all the clout necessary for this State. If I need or want anything, the Premier is always there to give me advice and assistance. He does that not only for me but also for every Minister in this Government, no matter at which end of the front bench they sit, and I would say he does it for every one of his backbenchers, and honestly tries to do it for all members of the Opposition. He is, after all, Premier of this State.

The Employment Council, which almost defeats what the Leader of the Opposition—

*Ms Key interjecting:*

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** The shadow Minister—

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Order! The Minister should not respond to interjections. We are guests in this Chamber of standing, and people should respect it and proceed as a Committee, not engage in debate. Thank you, Minister.

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I take your ruling, Sir. The Employment Council almost seems to confound what the Leader was saying because, after all, the Premier has appointed me as its Chair and it has among its members the Minister for Industry and Trade, the Minister for Education and Children's Services, and the Minister for Government Services and Information Technology. All of those colleagues and friends are senior to me, but the Premier has decided that, for the running of the council, I have the time to devote to that, and therefore I should chair it. That is a collegiate approach where we look beyond who has which rank and clout and all those sorts of things to see who could do the best job. In employment, what we are trying to focus on is not clout and things like that but actually getting—

*Mr Scalzi interjecting:*

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** Yes, thank you, not concentrate on territoriality. We are trying to focus on getting the Government's job done across the whole of government. On 10 February 1999 as an outcome of the Jobs Workshop and in direct response—and I acknowledge the United Trades and Labor Council's submission—the Employment Council was announced to advise the Government on opportunities to stimulate employment growth; strengthen industry; and coordinate Government's employment, training, industry and economic development schemes.

I do not think—and I am sure the Leader will acknowledge this from his number of years as a Minister—that any Government has managed to quite get perfect the interplay of all the departments of Government, to get everything working strategically focussed in the right direction working

all at once. Government, as the Leader would know, is a big multifaceted organisation. One of the main functions of this council, I repeat, is to coordinate the employment, training, industry and economic development programs so that Government is as far as possible acting in concert with a single purpose.

I am not playing Party politics here, because I would acknowledge that Labor in Government would have sought to achieve the same thing. Any Party in Government would look to do that, and that is one of the biggest challenges that will confront the council. The council will comprise members of the public, private and community sector, and work with a number of Government Ministers. It will be based on the Premier's very successful 'Food for the Future' model, and it will be supported by a senior officials committee, chaired by Mr Geoff Spring, sitting on my left, and the Chief Executives of the Departments of Industry and Trade, Administrative and Information Services, and Education Training and Employment, whilst the Director of State Development Policy, Department of Premier and Cabinet, will attend the Employment Council meetings as observer and will then form the core of the senior officials group.

We cannot promise that this is the great panacea that will fix all things, but we can believe that we will be able to come in here and confidently say that this is a bold and good initiative, put forward by the United Trades and Labor Council, which we have grasped with alacrity because we believe it is worth trying. We believe it will actually produce better outcomes than the Premier's Partnership for Jobs forum, and will result in better employment strategies for South Australia. I hope when that comes to fruition that the Leader, in his bipartisan way, will come in here and say, 'Well done! The Premier was right to have this poor little bumbling junior Minister handling the job because at least he got it done.'

**Ms KEY:** I want to put on record my concern that we will spend only 20 minutes on the issue of Youth Affairs, and I think that is disgraceful. I take this portfolio very seriously, and I know the Minister does also, but to try to deal with the issues in the budget papers in that time will be very difficult.

In his opening statement, the Minister said that he has talked to a number of youth and obtained their views, but I just wonder how the Ministerial Council of Young South Australians is going. At last year's Estimates Committee, I asked the Minister at the time (Hon. Joan Hall) when the Ministerial Council of Young South Australians would be set up. She said:

I am aware of some of the unfortunate delays that have been experienced in the efforts of former Ministers to establish the Ministerial Council of Young South Australians. This initiative is proceeding quickly and the finalisation of those details is nearing completion. I am confident the council will be formed and playing a valuable role in the Youth portfolio this year.

This is June 1998. I refer to volume 2, Budget Paper 4, page 813. Can the Minister explain why the much promised Ministerial Council of Young South Australians is still not in place despite first being promised by his Government at the election in 1993? Why have Ministers Such, Kotz, Buckby, Hall, and now you, failed to deliver on one of your core commitments in Youth Affairs? Why was the list of names for the Youth Advisory Committee, known as Youth Plus, released to the media following a dinner at Government House on Friday 21 May 1999? Have those names been approved through the usual Cabinet process; if so, why has no announcement been made of the establishment of the

committee? Will the Minister give a clear undertaking that the Ministerial Council of Young South Australians will include appropriate representation of young people from rural and remote areas? I refer the Minister to the vice-regal reference where the names of the people who will be on this committee appear—if it ever happens. Are any youth representing country areas on this new council?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I find it somewhat confusing. In one part of the question the member alleges that this council does not exist and therefore I have failed because there is no council. In another part of her question she alleges that the council does exist because the Governor has had its members to dinner. I think, if the member reads her press cuttings, she will form the impression from what was said in the vice-regal notices that perhaps the council does exist because it was there. She cannot have it both ways.

**Ms KEY:** Does it exist? Has Cabinet approved it?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** Let us deal with one thing at a time. I cannot answer for my predecessors, but in the nine months since I have been Minister for Youth I have found that it is a very thorny road which has to be trodden very carefully and with great precision because there are those, as the shadow Minister knows, who appear to want to sit on the sidelines and constantly carp and criticise and to bring into doubt any decision that is made. When we get Youth Plus up and running, when it is all there and in public view, it will be the best advisory council that any Minister in this Government has, and I say that without fear of contradiction. That is what we set out to achieve.

In the nine months since I have been Minister, we have had 100 applications. To ensure that I could not be accused of interfering, that someone would not get up in Parliament and say, 'Which of them are Young Liberals?' and the sort of thing that we had in the review committee, we sorted through the applications, reduced them by about half and put the process out for tender. Morgan and Banks were successful. Morgan and Banks conducted an interview and self assessment process with the 55 applications. They then submitted a list of names, I think about 33, and there was an interview panel on which I had no nominee other than my Executive Director. It also included the Deputy Commissioner for Public Employment, Jan Andrews, and a young journalist involved in South Australian radio. That panel conducted the interviews and provided me with a list of names of people they thought were suitable for Youth Plus. So we completed that process within nine months.

**Ms KEY:** Does the council exist, does Youth Plus exist and has it been approved by Cabinet? Are there any rural representatives on that committee, if it exists that is?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I have answered the first part of the question, and the answer to the second part of the question is, 'Yes.' I would like to say to the member that these are the 15 best South Australians, but that is not necessarily true because we were looking for a good team that represented people of Aboriginal background, diverse cultural background, gender balance, a balance of people who are tertiary employed and unemployed and, as the honourable member specifically asks, regional youth—a balance of people in the whole youth cohort between the ages of 13 and 24.

The answer is that we believe that we have absolute balance in respect of the people whom we believe should form the basis of Youth Plus. Later on, as I have promised, I will not only supply the names to the shadow Minister but invite the shadow Minister to come along and meet them

because there is nothing secretive about this. The shadow Minister will be more than pleased with the calibre of young people who will provide direct policy advice to this Government. It might have taken four years and it might be the subject of criticism—

*Ms Key interjecting:*

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** Six years. It might be the subject of criticism for that, quite rightly, but I can promise the member that, when it happens, it will be one of the best innovations that has happened for a long time. I would rather wait a little while longer and get it right than rush it through and get it partly right or have it subject to criticism.

**Ms KEY:** Can I ask a supplementary question, Sir?

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Just before you do, I point out for the record that a ministerial advisory committee was established in 1996, but then I left the ministry.

**Ms KEY:** I wanted to check the terms of reference or the amount of input that this group will have. The Minister has said that it exists and that it is representative of young people in South Australia, and I do not doubt that there is a lot of talent in that group. However, some problems have arisen at Federal level with the round table that has been established by Dr Kemp. One of the headlines in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of Saturday 12 June was 'Seen but not heard—young Australia stifled'. One of the complaints from the people on that committee was that they were allowed to talk but only about certain things and certain issues. Does the Minister have any comments about the vision he would see for his round table equivalent?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** Obviously, I cannot comment on Dr Kemp or how he conducts his affairs at Federal level. I can say that, given the choice, I would rather my advisory council be heard but not necessarily seen. I have seen the damage that can be done to young people when they are put up to do a job for a Government or put up as a spokesperson. They can be subjected (I think unwittingly) through public scrutiny and through peer scrutiny to absolutely unfair pressures. I think one of the important things—and I think the shadow Minister will acknowledge this—in Youth Plus is that it comprises ordinary young people as far as is possible. By that I mean that they are able to work in the community and not be seen as a point for every pressure group to go to and pressure.

I have no intention at all of fettering them in respect of their discussions with me and consequently the advice that I would like to take to the Premier and to the rest of the Government. I believe that I will form a working compact with those young people so that I can get solid, reliable advice. That is what I am seeking to do, and I hope that that answers the question. I do not want those young people to become the butt of criticism because the group makes a decision. I believe that they deserve some right of privacy, some right of protection, as I believe we do, too. I think sometimes we get exposed to criticisms and have various parts of our life exposed that really are not the absolute right of someone just because we happen to hold public office.

**Ms KEY:** On 15 June this year the Chief Executive of the Department of Education, Training and Employment, Mr Geoff Spring, announced the creation of the new Office of Employment and Youth. The circular (which I have in my possession) is addressed to directors and concerns the changes. It contains one sentence on youth affairs which states:

The youth sector will also continue to be a major priority with regard to the operations of the Office of Employment and Youth.

Can the Minister outline the specific youth affairs outcomes from the senior executive position created in 1998, known as Executive Director of Employment and Youth Affairs? Why did Mr John Halsey appointed for a five year contract position in May 1998 not complete more than nine months of service in that position? Has the Government effectively wasted the first year of operation of the employment and youth affairs group through staffing difficulties, poor planning and lack of focus in the youth affairs portfolio? Will the Minister outline the specifics of how the youth sector will be a major priority with respect to the operations of the Office of Employment and Youth when basically the directions hardly feature youth at all?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** I will ask Mr Spring to comment in a moment but, first, I will respond with respect to the political side. The answer is, 'Certainly not.' It is important to realise, as you do, Sir, that the Minister for Youth and Minister for Employment are two separate ministries. I am Minister for Youth, and that is a portfolio in its own right under the delegate responsibility of the Minister for Education, Children's Services and Training; and I am also the Minister for Employment.

So, in fact, I have two separate portfolio responsibilities. Each has its own budget line. As there is one Minister, it is cogent for us in this whole of Government approach to look at the affairs of employment and the affairs of youth and, while keeping the two clearly separate, by combining those service provisions and perhaps some policy provisions, to get the most effective delivery. There are two components: one is employment and the other is youth. They are separate, distinct and have their own budgets, and they will retain that nature. There being one Minister, the service provided to those two units is being looked at by Mr Spring, as a collegiate decision.

As for the Executive Director, when I started I was delighted. John Halsey was principal at Ceduna when I was principal at Cook. We have a longstanding and personal friendship. I was delighted to have John as the Executive Director. I was disappointed when it was felt that John's long and very highly valued experience in education, specifically in rural education, meant that he was asked to fulfil another very senior position in respect of country kids in South Australia.

I do not have to tell the member for Flinders that I did not like being asked what I thought of that decision, but I did not hesitate because, as the shadow Minister would know, rural youth have some very specific problems and there are great difficulties in regional South Australia. There was no choice but to release a man of that expertise to that sort of job. That left us without an Executive Director, but the position was temporarily filled by Ms Jennifer Taylor. I have to say that in the time she acted as my temporary head of department there was not one glitch, hesitation or even momentary pause in the things we were trying to do. The transition from one to the another went like silk. Ms Taylor has totally impressed me. Through no fault of my own she applied for the job and has been successful in gaining it, and I am very proud to have her as my Executive Director. She is one of the most talented younger people in Government service with whom it has been my privilege to work. I think she will do an exemplary job, and I am only worried that before I lose the ministry Mr Spring might pinch her to go off and do something else.

**Mr Spring:** The short delay in the permanent appointment was due to the fact that I came in and needed a few weeks to get my feet under the desk. The position had been advertised

and was duly interviewed for in open competition, and Ms Taylor won the job. On the other side, the reorganisation is looking at providing a better service to our clients and customers. In respect of the reorganisation of TAFE and its effect on the employment and youth areas, we had two sectors looking after apprenticeships as part of an end-on process, and they were in separate divisions. Because of the enormous growth of over 100 per cent in apprenticeships, we were having difficulty ensuring that we got all our contract administration done on time. Looking at the process it seemed that, if we put these two areas which were working separately together under the employment portfolio, we would be able to get the job done more quickly and some of the delays that are caused by branch barriers in all organisations would disappear. There has already been some improvement in catching up some of the backlog, and it is our intention that that will continue.

**Ms KEY:** I am pleased to hear the Minister's comments, and I do not doubt his sincerity and dedication to the area, but from my reading of the budget papers I think there has been a cut to the Youth SA budget. In 1997-98 Youth SA was seen as a main agency of the Government for the provision of policy advice on youth affairs, issues and coordination of the promotion of youth related activities within the youth portfolio. That was what Minister Hall said in Estimates Committees in 1998. We were then looking at over \$1.4 million. In the 1998-99 budget, there was a rise of approximately \$2.1 million. My reading of the budget—and I hope the Minister can correct me and say that I am wrong—is that in 1999-2000 the Youth SA budget has been slashed to \$1.2 million. In comparison with budgets over the past few years, this proposed expenditure for youth affairs is actually below that when Minister Kotz was the Minister in 1997-98. I hope I am wrong in my calculations, but how would the Minister match up what seems to be funding and resource cuts with the point about youth agencies being a major priority in the department?

**The Hon. M.K. Brindal:** Nothing has changed in the role of the youth agency providing across Government advice, policy and persuasive powers to other Government Ministers. The two primary agencies that affect youth are the wider Department of Education, Children's Services and Training and the Department of Family and Youth Services, and both those Ministers expend considerable amounts in the youth area. That is not included in the youth government but it is legitimate government youth expenditure, in which I work in concert with those Ministers in working through policies. As one example off the top of my head, Minister Brown this year spoke about the anti-smoking strategy which directly impinges on young people and which has a considerable input from his department. So, there is no change in that.

In terms of expenditures, this year there is a reduction in expenditure, but there is no reduction in budget. I will explain what happened; I am not just trying to confuse you. One of the problems in the youth portfolio was an accumulating problem of a considerable carry-over of funds. Members would be aware that a budget allocation is made and some of those funds are often not expended. I believe that last year the youth portfolio had a particular problem in that there was a carry-over of funds of \$851 000 which, in a budget which last year was \$1.16 million, was a considerable carry-over—nearly equivalent to the budget. That was listed as expenditure for last year. As a result, there was a budget of \$1.16 million and it had carry-over funds of \$851 000, and

that gave the budget figure of just over \$2 million that the honourable member mentioned.

This year we have had an increase in our budget; it is only marginal, but it is \$1.17 million. Because last year's expenditure included the carry-over funds and most of those have been expended, this year we are back to a budget that is the same as last year's. We do not have as much money to spend, because we spent much of the accumulated funds last year. I will not lie and say we have exactly \$1.17 million. There are carry-over-funds for next year from this year. We are not sure what the exact figure is, but it is nowhere near the \$800 000 which they spent last year. I am sure the shadow Minister will share my disappointment: I would have loved to believe that the budget was \$2 million and that I would get \$2 million from the Treasurer, but I do not have the spare width of fabric to spend as many carry-over funds as were available last year. The budget has not been cut. I am sure there is enough money there, and I have talked this through with my Executive Director, Mr Spring and Malcolm Buckby. I am sure there are enough funds there adequately to carry on the business that we are supposed to be carrying on, namely, the business of developing youth policy in this State, but we do not have as much money to spend this year as we had last year. So, that is accurate.

I apologise to the shadow Minister that we have not had more time on youth affairs. I am quite prepared to take on notice any questions she has left and give her a proper answer. I believe I have been discourteous to the shadow Minister in not allowing her to have more time, but I do not set the timetable for this (and that is no reflection on anyone who does). I have been in this place long enough to believe that, when the Leader of the Opposition comes in and asks me questions on employment, I must answer as fully as I can because, if you try to short-cut this process you are sometimes accused of misleading the House, and I do not want to do that. The honourable member can give us any further questions formally or informally and we promise to answer them.

*[Sitting suspended from 6.1 to 7.30 p.m.]*

#### **Membership:**

Mr Foley substituted for Ms Key.

**The Hon. R.B. SUCH:** The first question concerns the monitoring of the quality of training provided in the State. What brought this to my attention was that I noticed that a council in a country area had nominated nearly all its office work force as trainees. I am not suggesting that it is an abuse, but I would be interested to know what steps the Minister and his department take to ensure that the quality of the new era of training is maintained.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** This issue was raised at last week's ANTAMINCO Ministers' meeting in Sydney. Other States appear to be having more trouble than we are having in this area. The council to which the member for Fisher has alluded is Murray Bridge Council. It initially converted 67, now 55, of its 150 existing employees to a contract of training across a range of vocations between 18 December 1998 and 28 December 1998 for the purpose of undertaking training towards a qualification. Workers were consulted and 55 chose to take up and continue with the offer of training. Departmental officers have been very closely involved with the contract of training arrangements. It has been stated that the council's intent was to genuinely up-skill its existing work force. Not

all employees who entered the contract attracted subsidies, but training is being provided for them in up-skilling.

As the honourable member has indicated, there has been an allegation that Murray Bridge Council had declared all its employees as trainees to maximise the financial benefit. Departmental employees have looked at this very closely and believe they are within the guidelines. But, as I said, at the ANTAMINCO conference in Sydney last Friday, other States were reporting abuses and some rotting of this system. The honourable member is quite right: it must be monitored very closely to ensure that there is not abuse.

We have taken action in South Australia by implementing policies to ensure that public funds are paid only when the skills are acquired. Initially some of those funds were being paid up-front. It is now paid after the skills have been acquired. Quality assurance criteria for traineeships will be reviewed in July 1999 as to their effectiveness and the review will be submitted to the ARC in October 1999. Rigorous auditing of registered training authorities and introduction of audits and quality processes for group training and employer approvals are also being undertaken. I believe that the department is acting to ensure that the quality, which the member for Fisher has indicated, is maintained.

**The Hon. R.B. SUCH:** The second question relates to the cost of tuition at TAFE. I know course costs vary. I noticed recently that at the Regency Institute for Commercial Cookery for a one semester program the fees are now \$2 400 plus about \$800 for knives and uniforms. I have taken up this issue with the Federal Minister without success but, as State Minister, would you consider the possibility of a HECS type scheme being introduced so that students who are not financially well placed could repay that cost at the end of their course? I realise it would involve the Commonwealth coming to the party, and I am not blaming TAFE, because those courses are expensive, but I do feel that young people from less well off families are being denied opportunities. One possibility would be a HECS type scheme to apply to courses offered within TAFE.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** It is an issue I would be quite prepared to take up with Minister Kemp to explore whether that would be possible and how the Commonwealth would view that. I agree that there are courses within TAFE that cost a significant amount, but I am happy to take that issue on notice and examine it.

**Mr McEwen:** Could the Minister give us an update on the TAFE SA corporate structure? I understand that there have been recent personnel changes and some shift in what has been a corporate entity that has made itself TAFE SA.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The establishment of the Office of Vocational Education and Training and the Office of Employment and Youth within the department was announced by Mr Spring on 15 June this year. The Office of Vocational Education and Training integrates the Government's VET responsibilities within the department and provides a single focus for the implementation of VEET board directions and initiatives as reflected in the State strategic plan for vocational education and training. Dr Jeff Wood, a nationally respected figure in the VET area, leads the office.

TAFE SA no longer exists as a separate entity. In 1997 it came under the control of one ministry and under the control of one department. The position of the Executive Director of TAFE SA is abolished. The corporate support to TAFE institutes will be integrated with the existing corporate services, human resources and IT service areas. Institutes will

move to a greater autonomy in line with Partnerships 21. The savings that we expect to achieve from this will be redirected to the delivery of courses to improve our skills profile.

The Office of Employment and Youth builds very closely on working relationships established with the South Australian community through jobs workshops; it will deliver the employment outcomes signalled in the employment statement; and it integrates the functions of Employment SA, Youth SA and the apprenticeship- traineeship management.

**Mr McEwen:** I have a supplementary question. I wonder where the Chairs of the Institute councils sit in that. Were they involved in discussion about that shift? Are they collectively comfortable with it?

**Mr Spring:** I have had several discussions at their request with Chairs of Institute councils. They have recently formed themselves into an organisation and have sought administrative and executive support, which has been agreed to. The councils and the directors are seeking greater autonomy. The reasons for that, I think, are several-fold. First, part of any TAFE college budget relates to earnings. Several interstate TAFEs are now marketing courses into South Australia, so we are facing competition and jobs are being created in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane by marketing into South Australia. Two can play at that game. South Australia has done that in the past and can do that again.

One of the reasons why they are seeking greater autonomy and freedom of action is to be able to compete not only in the interstate market but also with the onset of information technology; for example, the Government has just put in a significant amount of money for the virtual learning environment, which is one of the platforms needed to offer courses both interstate and overseas. The ability to move quickly, to respond to market demands, to respond to competition from other places, and in fact to create jobs will be possible if we are able to be competitive in those markets. It is one of the things that institutes are looking for.

There is also the impact of competition policy. The honourable member may know that that requires TAFEs to be competitive with private TAFE providers. Again, to do that they need freedom of action within Government policy guidelines. That strikes a cord every time you talk about it with TAFE council chairs. So, those are the main points.

The other obvious point is that in the past three years the TAFE institutes have been very good at improving their productivity to the point where they are now in excess of ANTA standards, whereas two or three years ago they were behind. So, the productivity side of it is very good. They will need to continue to do that. If they are to compete fairly with private providers in the light of the national competition policy, it is part of that competitiveness notion. There are a number of environmental reasons why it makes good sense. These organisations are large and very capable; in fact, they already have many of the powers that they seek through the way they operate and by delegation. That is one aspect of the package: to enable them to operate in that way. At the moment, consultation is taking place with colleges. Denise Janek, the 2IC at Regency, is part of Partnerships 21 and is widely respected. So, those discussions are taking place and will continue over the next few weeks.

In the interim, we have a job to do for the next financial year. We are working with TAFE directors and through our budget situation. That is probably a long answer, but that is the general background to it. Within the office itself, we had clear duplication. In terms of the reorganisation that took place a couple of years ago, we had duplication of the finance

sections, the personnel sections and the IT sections—something that is not sensible. So, what we are doing with TAFE, the school sector and all the various parts of the department is creating central, shared services agencies so that these things can be done more efficiently. In turn, that allows us to make more money available for programs, and that is our business.

**Mr McEwen:** It is important that that is on the record. My second question relates to my pet topic: winners in alliance amalgamation. In as yet unanswered correspondence to the Premier and two letters to the Minister I have canvassed the notion that, if you get the hierarchy wrong in terms of the director and two day to day managers, whatever you believe will be the outcome of an alliance it is in fact an amalgamation. I have put it to the Minister on a number of occasions that, unless the two independent campuses have their own educational leadership at a senior level, it will not work. The proposition is that you then need, in effect, three directors working collaboratively. Where is that debate up to? I understand that one of those positions has been advertised.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The alliance director position has been advertised both in the *Advertiser* and the *Australian*. Applications have closed. A panel is being set up with the two council Presidents, that is, Eric Roughana and Peter Brockoff. Steve Kelton, the Director of Human Resources in the department, is the Chair. The panel also includes an institute director. I am advised that short-listing will take place this week and that the new officer will be a top of the range alliance director. There is no doubt that strategic alliances between the institutes of TAFE do create administration efficiencies. I believe that it also enhances regional opportunities by expanding the program delivery within rural areas. That is the case between the Onkaparinga and South-East Institutes.

As the member for Gordon knows, the heads of agreement to form that strategic alliance was signed by council presidents in March 1999. The alliance will enable the institutes to share corporate functions, to integrate educational delivery teams, to optimise services in both regions, to develop shared strategies for business, growth and commercial activity and to promote the development of common programs such as viticulture, visual arts and IT. It is not an amalgamation of the two institutes, because each maintains its own council and regional identity. The alliance director is responsible for both institutes. The committee has been formed to choose that person.

#### Membership:

Ms White substituted for the Hon. M.D. Rann.

**Mr FOLEY:** First, the Minister might need to check the telephone system in the Department of Education. I telephoned on a couple of occasions the other day to speak to senior executives in the Department of Education only to find the telephone being answered by a policy adviser in the Minister's office. I can only assume that there is a malfunction in the telephone system. I could not believe that the Minister would be so untrusting of the senior executives in education that he would not let them talk to a member of Parliament. As the Minister would be aware—because he and I have had a number of discussions on this—about two years ago the Ethelton Primary School in my electorate and the Semaphore Park Primary School in the neighbouring electorate of Lee made a joint decision to amalgamate. Obviously this was a gut wrenching decision, particularly for

Ethelton primary given the reasonable probability that it would have to close, based on department views put forward years earlier.

As the Minister knows, the decision to amalgamate was taken, and the Department of Education moved swiftly to establish a working party—and this is obviously how these things are done—of about 18 people, four of whom were local members of school councils and the rest departmental officers, SAIT representatives and others. That working party spent 18 months drafting a plan to close one of the schools. As the Minister would recall, Ethelton primary was originally chosen as the site to be closed. A meeting was then arranged with the Minister and the former head of the department, who is now the Director of the Centre for Lifelong Learning.

The Minister will recall that he gave the Ethelton Primary School an extra few weeks to reassess whether or not its facilities brief would be such that it could put forward a case to be reconsidered as the site for the amalgamation. In the end, that did not take place, and the working group signed off on a proposal to amalgamate both schools in the Semaphore Park precinct. As the Minister would know, as his officers would have informed him along the way, the school councils were told from the very beginning—and continually told throughout the process—that, once it had been decided that the school campus would be upgraded sufficiently to meet the physical needs of the students moving in, the incentive for parents to agree to the amalgamation was that they would have an upgraded school.

However, at an extraordinary meeting the other night a delegate of the Minister's department advised the school council meeting that in fact the Department of Education had not made any provisions in the capital works budget to fund an amalgamation, that parents would have to wait until the next budget cycle. This meant that real money would not be made available for up to 18 months. Why have you botched this amalgamation so badly, Minister? You personally, your department and your officers led the parents of both school councils, together with the principals and the staff of both schools, to the firm understanding that, once a decision was made that these schools would close, as was done 18 months ago, money would be provided to upgrade the chosen school campus. You chose to further reinforce that view at a meeting I had with you some months ago, but you have botched it and have not put any capital works funding into the budget because you simply could have put in there, if a site had not been chosen, 'Site to be decided'. Could you explain why the parents of the Ethelton school in particular feel so bitterly let down by your Government?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I thank the honourable member for his question. My door is open to any politician who wants to walk in, regardless from what side of the House they come. I am disappointed that the member for Hart has not chosen to do that rather than ringing within the department to check with me whether a decision has been made. Nobody has come to me and asked me about the amalgamation. We did not know the situation until the feasibility studies had been completed. The member for Hart is right: he and representatives from both Semaphore Park and Ethelton schools met in my office. I remember that at the meeting the Ethelton school people were very fixed that their school be the one that be retained and that Semaphore Park be closed. As a result of that I said that we would undertake further studies, even though the recommendation of the committee was to close Ethelton, and do a feasibility study on the whole issue.

Given the emotive nature of the amalgamation/closure of schools, one can never be quite sure what the outcome will be, as we saw in 1997: when decisions are made by committees, there is the question whether or not people stand by those decisions. I congratulate the Ethelton Primary School Council on standing by the decision of that feasibility study that showed that Semaphore Park is the optimal site in terms of amalgamation and I am pleased to report that I have signed off. If the member for the Hart had come to see me he might have got a different story. Here are the recommendations:

1. That the newly amalgamated school is located on the current Semaphore Park School.
2. That funds totalling \$1.42 million be approved for the amalgamation of Ethelton Primary School and Semaphore Park Primary School and St James Kindergarten onto the Semaphore Park site, plus \$80 000 for IT and furniture provision, bringing the total to \$1.5 million.
3. That the new school be ready to commence operation from the beginning of the year 2000 school year.
4. That the principal and deputy positions for the new school be advertised in term 3, 1999.
5. That the proceeds from the sale of the vacated site be used towards the redevelopment of the new site and our estimation of the value of that is between \$450 000 and \$585 000.
6. That additional funds totalling \$60 000 be approved to support training and development and information technology curriculum focus. Recurrent savings from the site over one year would also support these funds.
7. That, where possible, the redevelopment occurs when students are not on site and that the Ethelton students remain on their own site until redevelopments are completed on the Semaphore Park site.

I have stood by the commitment given to the Ethelton and Semaphore Park Primary Schools and to the member for Hart. It is a good idea, as my door is always open and my phone is always available to any MP from either side of the House, to call me direct. I assure members of both sides of the House that they will get an answer.

**Mr FOLEY:** Clearly my phone calls on Monday have worked because your district superintendent's advice to me on Monday was that there was no money and that it had not been found. The answer was that they would try to find it from within portfolio resources or go back to Treasury. The \$1.4 million is not in the Minister's capital works program. Where is the money coming from?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** As the honourable member would know, often we have slippage in capital works programs. This will be worked into that slippage to account for the amalgamation or closure of the Ethelton site.

**Mr FOLEY:** I will put on my hat as shadow Treasurer. Are you saying that you will find \$1.4 million from within your capital works program from slippage or will you defer other capital works programs because you have been caught out by me as the local member and because I rattled chains inside your department on Monday? If so, what will be cut to make way for this?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I am advised that the \$1.5 million is allocated from the 1999-2000 capital budget. The funds are there. No other project will be falling off the list to cater for this one. We believe we can deliver it.

**Mr FOLEY:** My second question is simply as follows: why would you not have included the \$1.5 million in your capital works budget for this financial year, site to be decided, and have it budgeted for properly and not be managing, as I have heard today from my colleague the shadow Minister, in a way where numbers float from one extreme to another day by day? Why was it not budgeted for properly?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The simple fact is that we had no guarantees. I have seen amalgamations and we only have to look at Croydon Primary School where a decision was taken by the cluster of schools that two schools would close. There was agreement by the committee and suddenly, when it came to which schools would close, there was a sudden change of heart by members of the committee. We saw the subsequent demonstrations that occurred. As the member for Hart knows and has rightly identified, closing a school is a very emotive issue. There are no guarantees whatsoever until the signatures are on the bottom line. You cannot guarantee that people will carry out what they say they will do.

When the people of Ethelton met with me, the member for Hart and the Semaphore Park people, they were extremely keen that their school be the school that would remain and would show up in the feasibility study as the school to remain open. As a result, it was a matter of waiting to see what was the outcome.

**Mr FOLEY:** I will ask a final question and leave. I will get back to my Treasury portfolio, where I will raise the question of how capital works budgets are managed in the Department of Education. I welcome the commitment and I will not be too precious about it. That is not what was communicated to the school council a week ago. It was not what your officers or principals were led to believe. Obviously some chains have been rattled and if your officer who is sitting here tonight had done me the courtesy of speaking to me when I rang the other day the issue could have been clarified. If you were fair dinkum this would have been in the budget. I am thankful it is now in the budget and unfortunately we will have to see what is passed over. The Minister knew that there would never be a backdown from school communities as to the amalgamation, so to suggest that there would be a degree of backflip by school communities is somewhat unfortunate because you have enough of your advisers sitting on this committee to know that they were going for it. It is sloppy budget management from the Department of Education's perspective. Local parents have been given enough anguish over this issue. I suggest through the Minister to his officers that they need to show a little more care for the community and not treat them in the way they did.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The agreement by both school councils to which the member for Hart refers was made on 10 May. Budget day was 25 May. The member for Hart would be well aware that the preparations for budget decisions would have begun well in advance of 10 May. I congratulate both school communities because this was a difficult decision, and I believe they have made the right decision. I think the amalgamated school will be very good because the parents are very keen, and the department looks forward to assisting with that amalgamation.

**Ms WHITE:** I want to follow up an issue that I raised with the Premier yesterday concerning the former Chief Executive of the Education Department, Mr Denis Ralph. How were the fall-back provisions in the salary package deal for Mr Ralph arrived at? I understand that Mr Ralph was an employee of the department and that at some stage he went to New South Wales. He returned from New South Wales to work on the ministerial staff of the former Education Minister, the Hon. Rob Lucas, and he was then appointed as the head of the Education Department on contract. Subsequently, another contract was signed when the departments amalgamated.

At what point in that chain of events were these fall-back provisions in Mr Ralph's salary package arrangements

upgraded and by whom? In order to find that out, I need to know what position Mr Ralph held, what his salary was when he left the State, whether he resigned at that time, what were his fall-back conditions, and what was his tenure, because the Premier said yesterday that Mr Ralph has permanent tenure. When Mr Ralph came back to South Australia and was appointed by Mr Lucas's office to the position of Chief Executive of the department, was that the point at which his tenure provisions were upgraded or did that take place at the subsequent signing of another contract, presumably when the department was restructured? I do not know whether it was at the time of signing the new contract, but I presume it was. Was that the point at which Mr Ralph's tenure provisions were upgraded? How did it come to pass that the fall-back provisions in his employment were upgraded to the level that they are now: that is, a chief executive equivalent salary package?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Mr Ralph is under the employ of the Premier. I have no responsibility for his contract or the provisions that have been worked out between the Premier and Mr Ralph. I genuinely cannot answer the honourable member's question, because I do not know. The Premier negotiated the contract, and the Commissioner for Public Employment would have the information that the honourable member requires. I genuinely do not know what those conditions are.

**Ms WHITE:** Can the Minister answer any part of my question?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** No. The honourable member should search out those answers through the Commissioner for Public Employment.

**Ms WHITE:** I refer to an issue which was raised in part by the member for Fisher and which is also of concern to me: that is, the State's contracts for training. The Minister announced early this year what he called a new record in the South Australian training market with 17 530 apprentices and trainees in the work force last year. A number of concerns have been raised with the Opposition about how many real jobs and looming skills shortages this means in the traditional trades areas.

The member for Fisher, as a former Minister for Training, has highlighted these concerns in the past. He has also touched on the problem of employers replacing existing full-time positions with traineeships. The Minister is aware of the situation that occurred at the Murray Bridge Council where 54 employees out of a total of 80-something plus 36 aged care workers took up council traineeships. So, that involved a sizeable proportion of the council staff. It could be argued that that was not a real increase in the number of jobs: upskilling was involved, but these were not new positions.

Is the Minister concerned about the fact that, rather than apprentices being taken on, most, indeed the bulk, of that figure of 17 530 involved traineeships? The number of apprenticeships is on the decline. Is the Minister concerned about that, and is he aware of the skills shortages that are taking place in this State? I draw to the Minister's attention one example of this. Electrical cables in the CBD and, I believe, at Elizabeth are laid underground and sheathed in lead. The Minister will remember the horrendous problems that occurred at Auckland when lead sheathed cables struck difficulties. Is he aware that South Australia has only one qualified lead cable joiner in this State who I am advised is in his 60s? If we had a problem with these cables, what would we do? We would either have to import skill or be in a bind such as the one which occurred in Auckland.

As we have distinct shortages of skills and the trend is towards traineeships rather than apprenticeships, I point out that this is a real problem. Does the Minister acknowledge that, and what does he intend to do to address these sorts of looming skills shortages?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The figures quoted by the member for Taylor are correct: apprentice and trainee commencements increased by 120 per cent in one year, which was quite outstanding. In 1997, 2 129 apprenticeships were undertaken and 6 013 traineeships, making a total of 8 142. In 1998, contradictory to what the member for Taylor suggests that apprenticeships have declined, the number of apprenticeships rose to 2 691. In TAFE institutes there were 2 296, and from private providers 395. So, that amounted to a 26.4 per cent increase in apprenticeships.

The number of traineeships increased astronomically to 15 187 (a 153 per cent increase). The number of traineeships undertaken in TAFE institutes was 3 136 and traineeships from private providers numbered 12 051. As the member for Taylor would know, on 1 January 1998 the training market was opened up to include private providers. I cannot bring the exact figure to mind, but approximately 486 to 500 private providers are now operating in South Australia to deliver training and apprenticeships in that area.

The member asked whether it is a concern of mine that the Murray Bridge scenario, for instance, may happen elsewhere. The Federal Government moved to tighten its traineeship rules only last month, recognising that some of that had been going on. It has now tightened its rules to make it much more stringent in what it can do in terms of registering existing employees as trainees. Instances of the rotting of traineeships similar to that which has occurred in Queensland have not been found in South Australia or other States, according to the Federal department and also the Australian National Training Authority chief executives.

The action taken to prevent rotting in South Australia includes the implementation of policies which ensure that public funds are paid only when additional skills are required. When we first started off with this program, the funding was being paid up front. When we ended up with a number of trainees not completing the course, it meant that we had to retrieve funds from a private provider or a TAFE institute. That is now not the case. Those organisations are now paid after the skills are acquired, so as a result of that we are only paying for those who complete the training.

The quality assurance criteria for traineeships, as I mentioned earlier, will be reviewed in July, and that will be submitted to the ARC in October 1999. Rigorous auditing of registered training authorities and the introduction of audits and quality processes for group training and employer approvals will also be undertaken. So, it is an area where we recognise that the department has to be diligent in terms of ensuring that trainers and employers abide by the guidelines and the rules that are set down for these traineeships in particular. It is very pleasing to see that apprenticeships are increasing, particularly now with vocational education training in schools. The ability to commence an apprenticeship while still at school will be an advantage to students who want to get involved in the trades area, so they can start their apprenticeship before they leave school and are then working towards their next certificate, so to speak. As I say, it is something that we are constantly looking at.

On the question of skills shortages and future growth, that is the role of the VEET board to take advice from industry as to where those shortages will be, in working with our industry



and training advisory boards to ensure that they put forward information to me or to the department to identify areas of shortage or demand within the system. Those back-ups, I guess you would say, are available, and those boards (VEET and ITAB) are certainly working hand in hand to monitor where shortages might occur in specific skills areas.

**Membership:**

Ms Rankine substituted for Mr Foley.

**Ms WHITE:** Why does TAFE SA, as it used to be, suffer so badly in the Minister's budget? Why is TAFE bearing so much of the cuts? If you look at the State Government outputs, in the budget for both this year and next year, and compared with the cuts to the rest of the department, the cuts to TAFE SA are several times greater as a proportion. Why is that, given the importance of vocational education? How can the Minister justify that?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** There has been no increase in the budget savings task for the TAFE sector as announced last year. The department's three year strategy commenced in 1998-99 included a savings task of \$9.77 million by the year 2001 for the TAFE sector. The savings target for last year was \$3.471 million. It rises this year by an additional \$4.702 million, and in 2001 by an additional \$1.604 million, which makes a total of \$9.77 million. Mr Treloar has the figures readily at hand and I will ask him to go through the figures with the member for Taylor and just explain to her that TAFE has not been inordinately targeted in terms of the area of budget savings.

**Mr Treloar:** Broadly in the year 1999-2000, TAFE SA reductions would be about the equivalent of the rest of the department. There are various ways of doing the analysis, but the TAFE SA reduction figures are well known—\$8.173 million for TAFE SA for 1999-2000. Again I can only say that both reductions are just below 4 per cent in terms of the rest of the department and TAFE SA.

The figures also need to be seen in the context of a fairly limited analysis, because we need to look at issues that have been raised today—things such as investment in a virtual learning environment or on-line learning. Certainly the member will see in the capital program a figure of \$9 950 000 for Information Technology projects for the total department, excluding DECS*tech*. Clearly within that there is a virtual learning environment as we have mentioned, but other systems will benefit TAFE as well.

Clearly the investment in infrastructure is significant in terms of the 1999-2000 budget, and a scan of the integrated program for the department would clearly indicate that in terms of the Onkaparinga Institute, alongside the Victor Harbor High School, the Regency Institute stage 2 major redevelopment, the Adelaide Institute of TAFE centre for Performing and Visual Arts, and a range of other projects. Again, that investment in the infrastructure is significant. I was personally involved with Dr Brian Nussey, the Spencer Institute Director, in taking the Public Works Committee through the investment of over \$5 million for the new facility of the Kadina campus alongside the Kadina High School. That investment will achieve significant productivity savings.

If we look at those sorts of issues in a holistic sense, it is a fairly narrow view to say that in some way TAFE is being treated in a sense worse than the rest of the department. Hanging outside of that is the issue of the enterprise agreement and the fact that, if TAFE staff, for example, had accepted the Government's offer of 13 per cent, we are

talking about this TAFE budget being supplemented by the order of \$13.266 million per annum out of an additional Treasury allocation to the department as soon as that agreement had been reached. So, once again, it is a fairly narrow sort of analysis to be saying that the reductions in TAFE are more than the rest of the department.

**Ms WHITE:** It is a very narrow sort of analysis to quote all the Federal money that goes into TAFE, because in front of me I have the figures which you have, too, and which clearly show that regarding State Government outputs TAFE this year and next year suffers cuts of just under 9 per cent and 10.5 per cent respectively, whereas the rest of the department suffers 2.5 per cent and 3 per cent cuts. So, that is several times more. However, given the quality of the answers in this whole Estimates process, I will state that and will not argue the point further, because it is useless.

I refer to traineeship subsidies with regard to individual sectors, first the tuna fishing industry.

*Mr McEwen interjecting:*

**Ms WHITE:** That is something I am coming to. I understand that there exists an agreement between the Australian Fisheries Academy and the Government to lease the \$16 million Port Adelaide TAFE facility for a peppercorn rent of about \$50 000 per annum. Given those figures, that is a return of about .3 per cent on investment. Three days before the last election a full page colour advertisement appeared in the *Advertiser* supporting the Liberal Government and thanking it for the Australian Fisheries Academy. The advertisement was authorised by a Mr Hagen Stehr, apparently on behalf of the fishing industry. The member for Gordon has alluded to subsidies of \$11 000 per trainee to that sector and additional costs are paid by the State Government for those trainees. What justification other than political can the Government provide for such a level of subsidy to one sector?

Further, I understand that until recently the South Australian Fishing Industry Council operated from the Australian Fisheries Academy but that it was not a very happy time. I now understand that the Government is refusing to allow SAFIC to conduct vocational training courses in competition with the Australian Fisheries Academy through its preference to the Australian Fisheries Academy. How does the Minister—

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN (Hon. G.A. Ingerson):** How many questions does the member want to ask?

**Ms WHITE:** How does the Minister justify that level of subsidy to that particular industry sector and that fishing academy provider?

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** It is a very important question. I have a special interest in this and I look forward to the Minister's very extensive answer.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Mr Chairman, there are a number of questions within that question and I do not have all the facts that the member for Taylor is seeking from me at the moment. I will take the question on notice and provide her with the details she seeks. I am aware of the Fisheries Academy and the excellent work it does. In terms of the cost per trainee, there may be factors in terms of the vessels that they train on, or whatever, that could relate to that \$11 000 figure that the member cited, but I will check the details before giving an answer.

**Ms WHITE:** I refer to Federal school funding for the next quadrennium.

*Mr Scalzi interjecting:*

**Ms WHITE:** No, this relates to the State Minister. Given that the wealthiest non-government schools will receive an additional \$72, I believe, per primary student from the Commonwealth Government under the new SES model with the shift from the education resource index to the SES ranking compared with only \$10 extra per student in the public system, does the Minister share my view that public schools have been relatively short changed in this latest Federal budget?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I am aware that in the latest Federal budget additional funds were allocated to the Catholic education system—predominantly the most significant amount of money. Off the top of my head I think \$500 million, or something like that—and I might be wrong—went towards the Catholic education system. It recognised that many of the independent Catholic schools are very low fee schools and particularly operate in low socio-economic areas. Just because a school is an independent school or a Catholic school does not mean that it is a wealthy school. I imagine that the Federal Government recognises that. I have not been privy to its conversations and the forming of its budget, but that much I do know. Obviously, the States push their Federal counterparts and Dr Kemp as hard as they can in terms of funding for public schools. The enrolment benchmark agreement that was undertaken between the States and the Federal Government changed funding in terms of public schools and independent schools, and we now operate according to the proportion of students that each sector has.

For instance, we could increase the numbers in public schools but, if the proportion remained the same from last year to this year, under these new rules we would still get the same amount of funding. So there are disadvantages, I guess, to the public system in that regard, but I understand that the Federal Government believes that choice should be available to all people within the community and, as a result, has put the enrolment benchmark agreement to the States.

**Ms WHITE:** Even the wealthiest of those non-government schools get several times more additional money than any of the public schools. I believe that the figures are an additional \$72 per primary student for the wealthiest non-government school and only \$10 extra per student in the public system. That is a significant difference. Does that not short change the public schools in South Australia?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Mr Spring has been dealing with this issue at CEO level, so I will hand over to him for a specific answer.

**Mr Spring:** Leaving aside the EBA, the history of which you are probably familiar with, the problem with the line that is being run by the AEU is that it is not comparing apples with apples. States have always provided approximately 90 per cent of State school funding, whereas since the 1970s the Federal Government has provided the lion's share of non-government funding, particularly for the poorer schools. Whilst there have been variations over that 20 year period, that is the situation, so to compare the relatively small proportion of Government school funding coming from the Commonwealth to what really amounts to basic funding is not comparing apples with apples. A relatively poor non-government school gets about 80 per cent of its combined funding from the State and Federal Governments and the remainder from fees. As I understand it, the amount offered to the Catholic education system, which is the main beneficiary of the change, was precisely the same in the policy statements of the two major Parties before the election.

Precisely the same amount was offered by the Coalition and the Labor policy statements. As I understand it, it arose from particularly the Catholic system having great difficulty over the last few years keeping pace with the award increases to Government school teachers throughout Australia. So, their pitch to us is that they were finding it increasingly difficult to maintain salary parity with Government school teachers, given their fee base and the fact that they were serving very poor communities. That is essentially the situation; it is very difficult to compare the two. My understanding of it from the Catholic education side is that they made their case on the basis of very difficult financial situations but that both the Coalition and Labor responded equally to that case.

**Mr McEwen:** I acknowledge that your door is always open and that John Behenna in particular is very helpful. I am absolutely delighted with what has happened at East Gambier in terms of the neighbourhood centre and the junior primary and primary school as part of our broader urban renewal strategy. I am aware of what Steve Kelton is doing with the panel for the Director of the Alliance. However, I am having difficulty getting an answer to the question of who within the alliance architecture will run the two institutes.

**Mr Spring:** I met with the two institute councils and agreed that there would be an assistant director at each of them. I met with them and the two institute councils put the proposal to me jointly that there would be assistant directors on each campus and there would be an advertisement for one director to manage the alliance.

**Mr McEwen:** From discussions with Eric Roughana it is clear that an assistant director which would translate to an EM5 was not what he was looking for, in terms of career responsibility or anything else. I understand from discussions with him that he has come back and said there should be someone with more authority within the local community, who is more accountable to the educational leadership at that level. I understand from discussions that the department and others require more than this badged thing called an 'assistant director'.

**Mr Spring:** They are called associate directors to take account of that status difference. I apologise, I should have explained that to you.

**Ms WHITE:** I would like to turn to the issue of courses and services and what the current cuts will mean. I turn first to child-care centres on campuses. I understand that Salisbury and Elizabeth TAFE campus centres are about to close. Will the Minister confirm that, and will he give me an update on the status of the other child-care facilities on other campuses? Will they survive these cuts or will they too close?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Discussions are occurring at the moment with all institute directors about their child-care facilities. As the member for Taylor would be aware, the Murray Institute of TAFE child-care facility at Nuriootpa was closed last year because it was losing over \$40 000 a year. Private child-care places were available in the town and it was found that only one or two children of TAFE employees or TAFE students were using the service. The rest of the children in that Nuriootpa centre came from the general community and had no association with TAFE whatsoever. So, that centre was closed last year. Discussions are going on at the moment with the directors of institutes. The Regency Institute's Elizabeth care centre data show that in 1998 staff new child enrolments totalled five, whereas community new child enrolments totalled 56. That was the results of a review of those child-care institutes.

The low utilisation rates at child-care centres offered by Regency at both its Elizabeth and Regency campuses have led to a review of the future financial viability of these two services. Elizabeth has 35 licensed places and the average attendance is 13 full-time equivalents with no full-time enrolments at that centre. At Regency, of the 56 licensed places, average attendance is 20 full-time equivalents and decreasing enrolments. The Director of Regency Institute has guaranteed that the centres will remain open until the end of this year, but whether those will continue is being considered, and we are looking at the viability of those centres.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** What is happening to the real estate at the Salisbury campus?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** There have been some negotiations with a potential buyer of the Salisbury campus and unfortunately that has now fallen through. There are other opportunities there from trainee organisations within the Elizabeth/Salisbury area, and currently the possibility is being investigated as to whether other training organisations may take up some of the accommodation at that campus. We looked as if we had a buyer but unfortunately that person withdrew the offer, so the university still has it on the market, but the university is negotiating or speaking with other training organisations regarding what utilisation might be made of the campus.

**Ms WHITE:** Students have contacted me about their concerns over the future of many courses, and I could pick many to question the Minister on. On behalf of my colleague the member for Kaurna I would like to raise some particular issues about which he has had a lot of constituent inquiries. They include the excellent cookery and hospitality courses run through the Noarlunga campus of the Onkaparinga TAFE. Students are worried about not only these but a lot of other courses being relocated from campus to campus. Will the Minister give some guarantee that the courses I mentioned at Onkaparinga will not be located elsewhere or reduced in scope? There have been a number of rumours that that is about to happen to courses such as the Certificate 3, Hospitality, Food and Beverage Operations; Certificate 1, Commercial Cookery; Certificate 2, Commercial Cookery; and Certificate 2, Hospitality Operations. It is rumoured that these courses will be scrapped. Will the Minister comment on this matter?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Program funding to support the John Reynell Restaurant at the Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE will continue in 1999-2000. Hospitality and cookery at Noarlunga have Government funding this year of \$352 781, and expanding traineeships and fee for service activity in this financial year (1999-2000) is to provide additional training places. We will be continuing in Certificate 3 Hospitality Food and Beverage Operations, which currently has one course with 18 students. It is a 560 hours course and runs for 20 weeks. There is also a gaming course, which has two courses and 24 students; bar operations, eight courses, 18 students; Certificate 1 Commercial Cookery, two courses, 14 students per course; Certificate 2 Commercial Cookery, three courses, 14 students; Certificate 2 Hospitality Operations, two courses, 17 students per course; and VET in schools, one course, 24 students.

In terms of the quality and the breadth of training in commercial cookery, the national training package for apprentices and commercial cookery students was developed through extensive consultation with the industry. The ITABs played a strong role in this. It incorporates both hands on and theoretical cookery skills and subjects. The commercial

cookery training package will be reviewed before its expiry in October 2000 to incorporate improvements to the breadth, the performance criteria and underpinning skills required.

We have been getting very good employment rates out of this. Graduate employment rates are greater than 60 per cent for cookery and over 70 per cent in hospitality. I am aware that the member for Reynell has expressed concern at the possible closure of the restaurant, but I can assure the member that it is certainly continuing for this year.

**Ms WHITE:** And after this year?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I cannot predict beyond that. I imagine that, if student numbers are maintained, it would continue on after that as well. I have no other recommendation that it would change. I can only say what information I have at this time. There is no recommendation to me at this time that it would shift campus.

**Ms WHITE:** I would like to return to the review of the legislation. Discussion paper No.1 on the review of the education and children's services legislation asks for views about extending the school leaving age and proposes that the leaving age be increased to 16. What would be the costs in terms of teachers' salaries and other expenses of increasing the school leaving age from 15 to 16 years?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The estimated cost is \$6.3 million.

**Ms WHITE:** Now that teachers are to train in their own time, what mechanisms are in place to ensure quality of training and to ensure that teachers receive the type of training that we desire, rather than just fulfilling their hours of training requirement on an *ad hoc* basis?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I will ask Mr Spring to answer that question because he has been deeply involved in that issue.

**Mr Spring:** There are two kinds of quality assurance. One relates to the requirement on each principal to personally work with staff to develop professional development plans for staff members. The other is the discussions we are having with universities, where relevant and where appropriate—which will be, hopefully, the majority of courses—to get accreditation and credit for those courses towards post graduate certificates and diplomas—not the diploma but units towards the diploma. We are trying to get win-win situations: first, we get high quality training; secondly, there is planned professional development for staff members; and, thirdly, they get credit towards a post graduate qualification. That trifecta should improve the overall professional quality of the teaching service.

**Ms WHITE:** At page 8.1 of the Portfolio Statements there is a list of some of the outcomes you want to achieve under your budget. You talk about instigating a change from direct service provision to purchasing services. How does that apply in the TAFE sector, particularly given your reorganisation and the formation of the Office of Vocational Education and Training? It seems to me that you are moving towards a group of TAFE colleges that compete with one another. Is that the model you are heading towards?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** The model to which the member for Taylor alludes is the purchaser-provider model. Mr Spring can very adequately explain that model to the honourable member.

**Mr Spring:** Elements of the purchaser-provider model are already in place. The DEET board advises the Minister, who is the State training authority under the Act, on priorities after consultation with ITABs. Based on that advice, the Minister allocates hours to be purchased from various institutes. So,

that is already in place. Many would say that that needs some finetuning because of big changes, for example, in the multimedia industry, and because we need to make sure that we have the forecasts so that we are ready to meet demand when it comes.

We were taking account of earnings in setting institute budgets. That has the effect of stifling initiative, and it is a fact that South Australian institutes do not earn as much from international students and industry as some of the other States. That can be turned around very quickly. A couple of our institutes do that brilliantly; Regency is a very good example, as is the Adelaide Institute. We want to free up the situation to take away any disincentives for people to be entrepreneurial.

TAFE South Australia has a history also of being collaborative. We do not want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We will continue to encourage collaborative relationships between colleges. The TAFE institutes have taken considerable initiatives. There are memorandums of understanding and strategic alliances between some TAFEs and universities. Depending on the nature of what it is they want to collaborate on, they will, as the Onkaparinga and South-East Institutes have, take their own initiatives to do these things. Through our International Education Unit and Education Adelaide, we want to ensure that there is very tight cooperation in bidding for overseas aid projects and industry training within Australia.

The main thrust that we are trying to achieve is not so that they become wildly competitive with each other. They do have to become competitive, though, because if you look at the figures for user choice, which is tendered publicly through Commonwealth funds, you will find that the TAFEs are not doing as well as private providers. If the majority of the money is going to private providers, it is a pretty good indication that there is some work to be done. In some States around the country, that is not the case. There is an element of being competitive in the sense of being productive so that we can win contracts within South Australia, interstate or internationally. In that sense, competition is a good thing, and without it we will not be able to grow the system and create the jobs here. South Australia is the place. If you wanted to know what was right at the top of the mark in South Australia over the last 20 years, you would go to Regency Park for certain things and to the Adelaide Institute for others. That has been the case for as long as I can remember. Certainly, that was the case when I was in the Northern Territory: I would come down here for assistance. We are not talking about major restructuring in that sense: we are trying to give the institutes a clear signal that we will not be getting in their way when they want to do these things.

**Ms WHITE:** Minister, your chief executive alluded to the costs per student hour. What are the latest figures for costs within TAFE per student hour as compared with recent years?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I am aware that the cost has reduced over the last couple of years. I was talking to the Director of the Murray Institute of TAFE on Thursday last week, and he advised me that the Murray Institute is now the cheapest in terms of costs per student hour of any institute in South Australia. He estimates that it will be \$8.50 per student hour. This year, the number of student hours increased from 650 000 to 850 000, and for 1999-2000 the institute hopes to deliver 1 million student hours. So, it has achieved an exceptional result. In terms of average student costs across others, I am advised that the unit costs from 1996 to 1998 decreased by at least 15 per cent, and that is using a standard

national methodology to benchmark. The ANTA scope activity grew by 18.6 per cent from 1996 to 1998, and total activity from 1996 to 1998, which includes fee for service and Commonwealth-designated purpose programs, grew by 27 per cent. So, there have been significant increases in student hours over the last two years.

I am aware that the benchmarks for training that have been set in the ANTA agreement have been reached and even surpassed in this State last year. The Chief Executive advises me that the costs per hour are different for each program and each course. I do not have an average cost in front of me at this stage, other than to say that we could get it for the honourable member. I will take it on notice and get it for 1996-97 and 1997-98 for the honourable member.

**Ms WHITE:** We talked about the concept of competing institutes of TAFE and the Minister earlier drew the comparison with Partnerships 21. We talked earlier about global budgets and the method or formula for allocation of funds. Will a per capita funding formula lead to competition between schools for students and is that a good or bad thing?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** It is a hypothetical question. I do not know, because it has not occurred as yet. Competition is a healthy thing in whatever field we are in. It brings out the best in people and ensures that the most efficient and best service is being delivered and given to the customers. Our customers in that area are the parents and children who attend our State school system. Whether it will bring about competition for schools vying for students I am not aware at this stage. Schools are already sensitive to enrolments because of the staffing formula. I imagine that each school would want to keep the number of students they have currently to ensure that they remain with the same staffing levels. As grants are on a per capita basis, schools would want to maintain their student numbers also. It is a hypothetical situation, but if it occurs I am sure there will not be any schools lying down and letting students walk out the gate from one school to another but will be looking to their own programs to ensure that they maintain their student numbers and are attractive to their community.

**Mrs PENFOLD:** Will the Minister advise what support the Government is giving to group training companies and indicate how many apprentices and trainees are involved?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Group training, particularly in the building and construction industry, is working very well. The ability of those within the industry not to have to employ an apprentice for the full year and being able to move that apprentice between companies and between sites has two benefits: first, to the company itself in that in quieter times in the construction industry those apprentices do not lose out; and, secondly, the apprentices end up gaining experience with more than one employee and on more than one building site and with different building expertise.

As of 31 March eight group training companies are operating in South Australia and receive joint State-Commonwealth funding support on a dollar for dollar basis. The total 1999-2000 Commonwealth-State budget allocation for group training is \$1.8 million, of which \$1.5 million is core funding and \$3 million is growth funding. Together the eight group training companies employ a total of 2 095 apprentices and trainees (so we are not talking small numbers in this area), 1 620 of whom are apprentices and 475 are employees. Five of the group training companies are industry based and three are regionally based. The five industry based companies include the engineering, plumbing, electrical, refrigeration, hospitality and motor trades and a local government focus,

while the three regionally based companies cover the Spencer Gulf, Mid North and the South-East. Our major contestable funding program is to be commenced in July and all providers of group training services will be able to compete for those funds to support the employment of additional apprentices and trainees. The system is working well in South Australia. Those areas of demand for apprentices, particularly in the building and construction industry, find it particularly helpful to access group training rather than a particular company having to take on an apprentice on a full-time basis. They can access those apprentices within that group training area.

**Mrs PENFOLD:** Will the Minister advise how many secondary school students in 1998 undertook VET programs in TAFE as part of their schooling and does the Minister see this as the way of the future? I am particularly interested in country regions.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** It is a particular focus of this Government. In the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a move by schools right across Australia and certainly by Education in South Australia to move away from that vocational education or technology training and concentrate purely on courses that would lead to a university qualification. We all know that not all young people in our community want to go to university or are equipped to do so. As I have said, the reinvigoration of vocational education training is being taken up enthusiastically in schools. The second vocational college at the Christies Beach High School, which I announced today, involves a cluster of eight schools in the area which will enable that college to reach out to 8 000 students in the south. That is of particular benefit to the southern area given the unemployment statistics in the south. Those schools are already working under Partnerships 21 in a partnership with the community and industry in the south. This college will further enhance that partnership, which is working well.

In 1998, a total of 13 593 students undertook recognised vocational education training as part of the school curriculum. That is outstanding in terms of the growth from 1997 of just over 2 000 students undertaking vocational education training. One of the advantages of this is the fact that qualifications received at secondary school level can provide a student with accreditation for moving on to an apprenticeship, a TAFE course, or a course conducted by a private provider.

So, before a young person has completed year 12 or their schooling, they are gaining accreditation in subjects for their next level of training. This is one of the real advantages of vocational education training. I believe that it will keep many more students at school, those students who perhaps would lose interest and drop out to get a job. I think that this initiative will keep a lot of those young people at school, because it delivers something in which they are vitally interested and can see some benefit.

I am reminded of the example of memorandums of agreement with schools. Regency TAFE has 128 memorandums of agreement with schools for the delivery of vocational education training. That is a significant number. The institute in my area of Gawler has memorandums of agreement with two of the three schools in Gawler and it is looking to form an agreement with the Gawler High School also.

Within the Government sector, those 13 593 students represent a significant increase on the figure for 1998 of 8 907 students compared with just under 2 500 in the previous year. Not only Government schools are taking up vocational education training—independent and Catholic

schools have also seen the benefits of vocational education training. In 1997, there were 22 metropolitan and 20 country departmental schools, and in 1998 those figures had risen to 61 metropolitan and 52 country. There were 70 programs in 1997, and in 1998 that number had increased to 258. There were 161 716 student contact hours in 1997, and in 1998 that figure rose to 454 032.

It is not just a matter of undertaking vocational education training but of whether it is completed, which is very important. The average completion rate of about 72 per cent reflects the commitment of both children and schools toward achieving successful vocational education training outcomes. In 1998, there was about a 74 per cent off the job completion rate: that is, delivery was provided by school staff using school facilities under the auspices of TAFE as a registered training provider.

So, this is a program from which we will see significant benefits in the future in terms of young people being trained to go into industry and to be job ready when they get there. My discussions with Holden management before the Windsor Gardens Vocational College was announced were extremely productive in terms of young students learning some of the particular occupational health and safety issues before they left Windsor Gardens, so they could be put straight onto the factory floor when they arrived at Holden. There was a real benefit for Holden as it did not have to undertake that training. There are some real benefits for South Australian students.

**Mrs PENFOLD:** TAFE on-line apparently has been a nationally successful program. What has been the cost?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** South Australia's TAFE sector is a national leader in on-line delivery of courses. We currently have 3 500 students studying 175 on-line subjects. A wide range of subjects is available, including small business, information technology, multimedia, aquaculture, electronics, transport and women's education. The TAFE on-line modules are used by 75 leading tertiary institutions worldwide, so it is not only in South Australia. On-line courses enable the delivery of information to students in workplaces, community and regional centres or their homes with access 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The on-line students gain core skills to participate in emerging global information economy. They are part of the department's virtual learning environment, and we have heard Mr Treloar tonight explain that we will be investing some \$4 million in that virtual learning environment in TAFE institutes this year. It provides that environment of support services to schools, TAFE students and departmental staff. The cost of achieving the current level of service and national leadership by TAFE on-line is estimated at \$2.16 million over the last four years, and an estimated \$1.82 million in revenue was gained during that period from externally funded projects and consulting services and on-line sales, whilst \$312 000 was specifically allocated for on-line content development in 1998-99. As I said, some \$4 million is the estimation for the virtual learning environment in 1999-2000.

The rural enterprise management certificate, also leading onto a degree, is a new course that I launched earlier this year at Roseworthy campus. It is exactly this type of on-line delivery course. Some 25 students started that course this year and I am advised it is travelling ahead very well. Again, this area of on-line delivery will expand even further. It gives us and TAFE some real opportunities in terms of overseas students undertaking on-line delivery courses through TAFE

via the Internet and improving our income from overseas students.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** I was just about to ask a question about web sites. Is there a common library source from which you can get all this information on the on-line services that we currently provide? In other words, can you go into the library to pick it up, or do you have to go to TAFE? How can a member of the public get information as to what is available on-line?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** We are in the process of developing a web site that covers the whole department. We are about to release that. There are tier-down web sites available where that sort of information that you are seeking is available. I do not have the web site addresses with me at the moment, but we do have an SA TAFE web site and I would imagine the information you are looking for would be on that web site. As I said, we are about to develop a whole of department web site which would then have web sites within that could flow down to provide information to customers.

**Ms WHITE:** I understand that a little while back the Minister's department purchased 4 500 units of a Y2K centurion correction card, but I understand that it was not compliant at all. It now meets level 2 of the SAAHB12198 compliance testing but, while it meets that level, it is not totally compliant and, given that under your whole of Government contracting you are operating in Windows NT, I understand that this particular card overrides and uses the real-time clock in that event. Was the Minister not aware that there was a South Australian product, which I understand was slightly cheaper and which is level 3 compliant; and why did this occur?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I am not aware of the details that the honourable member has indicated, but I will certainly take that question on notice and find out. It is important that we are Y2K compliant and I will undertake to get those details for her.

**Ms WHITE:** With regard to the Partnerships 21 exercise, will the Minister confirm that, under the plans circulating in the public arena at the moment, there will be no maximum class size or stipulated student contact time for each teacher; and how does that accord with current industrial agreements? I got that out of one of the HR issues papers.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I am not aware of that at all and certainly the staffing formulas that are currently in place will continue under Partnerships 21. There are no plans to change that. What the honourable member is saying is quite strange to me. I have not seen any plans.

**Mr Spring:** Staffing formulae are bound up in enterprise agreements and industrial agreements. Schools already have very substantial flexibility on setting class sizes and they do that regularly. Sometimes they will team teach and at other times, for parts of the day or parts of the week, they deliberately will create larger classes so that they can have one on one tuition. That sort of flexibility is regularly used by South Australian schools.

**Ms WHITE:** So, you are saying that there will be a maximum class size?

**Mr Spring:** I am not aware that we have one.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** In terms of staffing formulas, there are recommended class sizes for the various years and, when you move over that number of students, then obviously you click into another portion of a staff. As Mr Spring has said, whether a classroom has 35 children in it or whether it has 15 children in it is at the discretion of the principal of the

school. As Mr Spring has also said, if the principal decides that they will team teach or build the numbers up of a certain class to allow a smaller special tuition class, or something such as that to occur, it is within that school's flexibility. What we look at are the number of students within the school and the industrial relations by which we are bound and we allocate teachers according to the formula within that agreement.

**Ms WHITE:** So, are you saying that there will or will not be a maximum class size?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** No, I am not: I am saying that class size will be at the discretion of the principal. There are recommended class sizes in industrial agreements that will be adhered to by the department. There is a strict formula governing the number of students per teacher at different levels through the school system, but it is at the discretion of the principal whether each class sticks to that formula or whether it is varied for one reason or another within the school. I am not saying that there is a maximum: that is at the discretion of the principal of the school.

**Ms WHITE:** I read also that the concept of scrapping school councils and invoking school boards is proposed in this Partnerships 21 exercise. One of the documents suggested that the board be made up of between seven and 23 members; and parents, students, staff, community, business, industry, Government are the descriptors of those members. How will that operate? In other words, how will the boards be elected? For example, does the Minister see any potential to disfranchise parents from the management of their school? Certainly at some of the Partnerships 21 meetings I have attended, as soon as the word 'board' is mentioned some parents seem to have a negative response and a disinclination to be part of something like that. Will the Minister comment?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** First, the working party documentation addressed the issue of whether it be named a school board or school council, and it decided that the term 'school councils' would remain, so that naming will continue. We are still in the draft stage of addressing various issues that the honourable member has raised, but the whole idea of Partnerships 21 is not to disfranchise parents. In fact, it is the complete opposite, because there will be increased involvement of parents on school councils and in their community schools. So, we certainly would not be looking to discourage parents being involved in a school council. Those documents are still in draft form at this stage. Recommendations have not yet even come to the task force, so work is still being done on those issues.

**Mr SCALZI:** I refer to Output 1.3, page 8.18. While many of our training programs are now delivered by private providers, has there been an increase over the past few years in the number of students enrolled at TAFE?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** With private providers coming into competition with TAFE since 1 January 1998, we have seen some decrease in student numbers from 1997 to 1998 by 1 per cent, but there has also been an increase in accredited student curriculum hours of 2 per cent. This indicates that the amount of training delivered to students in TAFE has increased. It also means that students are committing themselves to longer term training, and in 1998 there was an average of 190 curriculum hours per student, which is an increase from 181 curriculum hours per student in 1997.

One of the messages that I stress when I speak to groups is the importance of training in Australia. In terms of OECD countries, Australia is behind in the level of its trained work force. We need to encourage young people and others within

our industries either to up-skill or to get involved in training and to continue that training throughout their life. It is a message that I certainly give to all school students when I speak with them: 'Do not just stop at year 11 or year 12 because you will need further training. The more training that you undertake, the greater opportunity you have of gaining employment and the more you can offer an employer when you are applying for a job. I think that, in many cases, the difference between getting a job and not getting a job is the fact that you have taken that extra step to do more training and the employer recognises that they are getting a highly skilled person.'

Those figures for 1999 to which the member alludes are not yet available but, for example, the number at Regency has increased this year; we do not yet have final figures for 1999.

**Mr SCALZI:** Has there been an overall increase in the amount of activity in accredited training programs in TAFE and private providers over the past five years?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Since 1994 the level of activity, as measured by curriculum hours provided, has steadily grown from 13.2 million to 18.8 million in 1998. Those figures for 1998 are currently being audited to double check them. It does represent a 42 per cent increase over five years. Until 1997, the State benefited from a steady increase each year in growth funds provided by the Commonwealth Government through the ANTA agreement. That was just under \$6 million extra each year, so it was a significant amount of money. The growth was a consequence of additional funds and efficiency strategies. The efficiency strategies continue. I expect to be able to confirm a growth from 1997 to 1998 in the order of some 10.8 per cent. That exceeded our targets set by ANTA in the ANTA agreement. So, for 1997-98 we were well above the target set.

The proportion of training provided through contestable funding means has expanded. TAFE institutes now receive a core level of funding, but they also compete with registered training organisations. So, they are now in competition with private providers of training for contestable funds. In 1998, 27.3 per cent of the delivered activity was funded on a contestable basis. This compares with only 3.8 per cent in 1994. Again, it shows that level of entry that has occurred as a result of the private providers coming into the training market.

I will give some figures of annual hours. In 1994, TAFE SA core training hours totalled 12 686 736 and contestable funding was 495 932 for a total of 13.182 million; in 1998 (to show the growth in TAFE SA), the estimation is 13 631 907 core hours and 5 120 865 hours in contestable funding. That contestable funding figure has grown more than seven times over that period. It does mean that our TAFEs are exposed to that and that they have to be efficient in terms of contestable funding.

**Mr SCALZI:** How many overseas students are now studying in our schools and TAFE institutes? Are these numbers generating any social or financial dividends for South Australia?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** With the establishment of Education Adelaide the Government noted that as a percentage of the population South Australia was not getting the right number of overseas students. I believe that South Australia has about 8.5 per cent of the Australian population, but we were achieving only about 4.4 per cent of the international students who come into Australia. So, according to our population, South Australia was performing well below the level that would be expected. It is the reason why

Education Adelaide was formed: to work with the universities, TAFE institutes and our school sector to increase the number of international, full fee paying students who come into this State. The Government is putting a significant amount of money into it over a three year period. We have some very good expertise on that Education Adelaide committee.

In terms of TAFE institutes, in semester 1, 1999, a total of 879 overseas students are enrolled in South Australian schools and TAFE institutes; 592 are undertaking TAFE award courses; and 98 are enrolled in ELI (English Language Intensive) courses. Some 153 students are enrolled in secondary courses, with a further 36 students undertaking intensive English in preparation for secondary study. There is a pleasing result overall in South Australia in view of the downturn in student numbers expected from the recent global economic downturn. The honourable member would be well aware of the Asian economic situation and that Australia, in particular, expects a fall-out from that in that fewer parents will be able to afford to send their student children to Australia to undertake education. So, it is a good result in terms of that particular economic activity, or lack of activity, occurring there at the moment.

This Government does recognise the benefits of having international students. In South Australia, international students contribute approximately \$22 million to the economy each year. That is based on estimated expenditure by each student of \$25 000 per year. But it does not stop there, because in a lot of cases we know that parents visit students while they are studying here. Of course, students not only purchase their courses from either universities or TAFE institutes but also purchase a range of services while they stay in this State. That \$22 million does not include universities and the non-government school sector. So, when you add that in it is an even greater sum than that. The estimated multiplier impact of a student coming in from overseas is three. When you look at that and the additional services—the fact that when parents come out they will not just see the student but will undoubtedly travel around and spend money in either South Australia or Australia—it is a significant market and one that we want to expand.

There are areas which are opening up and which look very promising. India is one market where significant work is being undertaken at the moment. In that case we have signed a couple of memorandums of agreement for delivery of courses through TAFE institutes. Ongoing work is taking place in that regard. I am aware of a delegation that will travel to India later this year to look at the sales of more courses from our education sector. Of course, it is not just the economic side: it is the social experience that our students achieve as well in terms of a true multicultural society and being able to learn by discussing with another student where they come from, the systems that operate in their countries, the sort of culture they have, their expectations and the sort of economy they have. So, it benefits our students as well, because their global knowledge increases as a result of having international students here. In many cases where international students then return to their own country, an allegiance is formed with South Australia.

There are a number of instances where students go back and end up running their own businesses or managing businesses and then return to South Australia to purchase products because of contacts they have made in South Australia. It does not just stop at the study when they leave and go back to their own country. It is a life-long relationship

because they have had a good experience in South Australia, and there is a high probability that they will continue to deal with South Australian companies or look to South Australia as a place to deal when they consider purchases from overseas countries.

**Mr SCALZI:** I have a supplementary question. The benefits are quite evident. The Minister has outlined from first-hand experience that schools in my electorate like Norwood Morialta have achieved benefits through overseas students programs and have achieved benefits for multiculturalism in general. What are we doing to make this more understood in the general community? It is not always the case that those benefits are understood by the general public.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** That is quite true. I know that a lot of schools are undertaking exchanges with other international high schools. For instance, the Gawler High School, with which I have a close experience, has for 10 years had an exchange with Huga City in Japan where 20 to 25 students come out from Japan each year for two weeks, and a similar number of students go to Japan for two weeks from Gawler High School. Both groups are getting to understand the culture of each country. That happens not only at Gawler High School but also in a range of other high schools right across the State and even in primary schools. In fact, on 3 July the Sandy Creek Primary School in my electorate will say goodbye to a group of Japanese students who have been here visiting that school and Lyndoch Primary School within the Barossa Valley. That is happening on a regular basis.

Education Adelaide is one of the vehicles that spreads the message that the marketing and taking of overseas students is important. The message to South Australians is not getting out there terribly well at this stage and we can improve on that and ensure that people, schools, principals and students do know the benefits of taking on international students, either on a permanent basis in terms of full-time study or on an exchange basis.

**Ms WHITE:** From the Opposition's viewpoint, given that this is a shrinking budget, while we do not see the Partnerships 21 process as a good or a bad thing—it depends on how it is implemented—we are concerned that it does not turn into a process to deliver more cuts. The question that has not been answered satisfactorily is: where will the money come from? The Minister outlined expenditure of about \$110 million—\$72 million plus \$38 million. Is that correct?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** In terms of Partnerships 21?

**Ms WHITE:** Yes. I thought they were the Minister's figures. I assumed that the \$38 million would come from the year level allocations for the equity component of Partnerships 21.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I do not recall using those figures that the member for Taylor has mis-stated, but I can give her a guarantee that Partnerships 21 is not aimed at reducing school budgets. School budgets will be maintained. As I have moved around the field, it has been said to me, 'You are just going to get us to be more efficient and then give us less money next year, and we won't benefit from making those efficiencies.' That is not the case. If the same number of students are at the school, the school budget will be maintained.

As I have said consistently, the benefit of Partnerships 21 is that it is voluntary: there is no pressure on any school to opt in and there will be no penalties for any school that does not. Schools which do come on board will keep all the savings that they make, and it will be at their discretion how they

wish to spend those savings. So, there is no plot by the department to say to schools which undertake the Partnerships 21 program and incur some savings in their budget, 'You did it for 10 per cent less this year than last year; therefore, our grants will reduce by 10 per cent.' That is not the idea behind this program.

We encourage schools to use their funds as efficiently as possible. If they make savings in the use of those funds, they will keep them. We will not change the structure. We can guarantee their funding for the next three years, and any central votes that we can redistribute to schools will increase their disposable dollars. What the honourable member suggests is not part of the theory or in my or the CEO's thoughts about the outcomes of Partnerships 21.

**Ms WHITE:** The Minister has made two competing statements. He said that no school would be worse off, but he also said that disadvantaged schools would be significantly better off—and he has a shrinking budget.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** We do not have a shrinking budget.

**Ms WHITE:** Well, the department is sustaining budget cuts. It is important to pinpoint where the money for this project will come from. The curriculum department has just been downsized. I refer particularly to some of the federally funded programs, such as languages and literacy, that have been restructured as part of that process. A lot of concern has been expressed about those sorts of programs that will be used to fund the Partnerships 21 program. If that is where the money will end up, will the Minister keep a tab on how that money which comes from the Commonwealth and is tied for specific purposes is used at the local level?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** Mr Spring has been looking at that curriculum area and has the details that the honourable member requires. I will ask him to answer that question.

**Mr Spring:** I reiterate unequivocally that the State's budget is set for three years. The money that is spent inside the school fence—whether that be for school grants or FIR staffing—is guaranteed. So, there is no sense of any cost cutting in respect of school budgets. We are taking the reductions in overheads within central office and central votes. The Minister has already said that where we can take a central vote, which we are now spending and distributing centrally, and redistribute that to schools through a transparent formula, we will, because that will increase their disposable income. Commonwealth and other grants are given to us, and we have to account for them. There are stringent rules, so we will not reduce or in any way fiddle with Commonwealth grants.

In fact, because they will be going to schools in accordance with formulae related to disadvantage, we will probably be able to get some more money out to schools because we will not need to have the administrative costs we now have with asking people to apply for grants and then going through processes which take several months, which means that schools do not get their grants for about four months into the school year. People will be told their budgets in October the preceding year. There will be efficiencies like that which we can pass on to schools which will create extra money.

We are not cutting the curriculum budget. As to the funds for those curriculum officers, we are currently in negotiation and calling for expressions of interest for community groups, schools and universities to take on the tasks being undertaken by those curriculum officers in support of the curriculum and standards framework working parties, so there is no reduction in the curriculum fund.



**Ms WHITE:** You have been careful to say that all savings made by schools will remain in schools, and all savings made through local management will go back into schools, yet I notice in your three year budget strategy made public last year that you had items labelled 'devolution of water', 'energy' and 'telephone costs to schools'—cuts, basically, and the size of those cuts in that particular instance was \$1 million in 1998-99, \$2 million in 1999-2000, and \$2 million in 2000-2001. In your budget strategy, there are cuts—some savings from locally managed schools being made through cuts. Have you changed those figures in your budget strategy or is that to continue, because that is in conflict with what you have just been saying?

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I think I will take that question on notice and look at it, unless Mr Treloar would like to have a go at answering it now.

**Mr Treloar:** The budget savings strategy was some 18 months to two years ago, and we looked at some of those savings. The work is still continuing in relation to the establishment of global budgets, for example. The thrust of our work in that area is to try to look at an equitable allocation for a site. If I can just use an example, at a particular site there is a considerable amount of excess accommodation.

**The ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Unfortunately, time has run out. I suggest that the Minister take the question on notice and provide a detailed answer. I declare the examination of the votes completed. I thank the Minister and his staff for their attendance today and for their advice to the Committee.

**The Hon. M.R. Buckby:** I would like to thank my staff. A significant amount of work is undertaken in preparing information for the Estimates Committee. I know that they have been working extremely hard for a considerable period to ensure that we have the best information that I can give to the Committee so that we can answer questions on the day and eliminate the number of questions that we take on notice. I place on record my sincere appreciation of the work undertaken by all my staff. It really is exceptional. The amount of information that comes out in this is just second to none.

**Ms WHITE:** Mr Acting Chairman, on behalf of the Opposition, I thank you and your predecessor for your patience, and the Minister and his advisers for their assistance.

#### ADJOURNMENT

At 10 p.m. the Committee adjourned until Thursday 24 June at 11 a.m.