

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION

Friday 29 August 2025

Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area

SKILLS, TAFE AND TERTIARY EDUCATION

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The Committee met at 09:15

MEMBERS

Ms Abigail Boyd (Chair)

The Hon. Susan Carter
The Hon. Anthony D'Adam
The Hon. Wes Fang
Ms Sue Higginson
The Hon. Dr Sarah Kaine
The Hon. Stephen Lawrence
The Hon. Rachel Merton (Deputy Chair)
The Hon. Tania Mihailuk
The Hon. Sarah Mitchell

PRESENT

The Hon. Steve Whan, *Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education*

CORRECTIONS TO TRANSCRIPT OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

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

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

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The CHAIR: Welcome to the second hearing of Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education for the inquiry into budget estimates 2025-2026. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today or watching us online. My name is Abigail Boyd, and I am Chair of the Committee. I welcome Minister Whan and accompanying officials to this hearing. Today the Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolios of Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education.

I ask everyone in the room to please turn their mobile phones to silent. Parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses in relation to the evidence they give today. However, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of the hearing. I urge witnesses to be careful about making comments to the media or to others after completing their evidence. In addition, the Legislative Council has adopted rules to provide procedural fairness for inquiry participants. I encourage Committee members and witnesses to be mindful of these procedures.

Welcome to our witnesses and thank you very much for making the time to give evidence. All witnesses will be sworn prior to giving evidence. Minister, I remind you that you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament so you don't need to be sworn again. Mr Dizdar and Mr Kurucz, you don't need to be sworn as you've already been sworn before this Committee during the inquiry.

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Mr MURAT DIZDAR, Secretary, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Mr JEREMY KURUCZ, Acting Deputy Secretary, Education and Skills Reform, NSW Department of Education, on former affirmation

Ms AMANDA LAWRENCE, Executive Director, Training Services NSW, NSW Department of Education, affirmed and examined

Ms CHLOE READ, Managing Director, TAFE NSW, affirmed and examined

Ms KERRY MEREDITH-SOTIRIS, Acting Chief Product and Quality Officer, TAFE NSW, affirmed and examined

Ms JULIE TICKLE, Chief People Officer, TAFE NSW, affirmed and examined

Mr MARK HAWKINS, Acting Chief Learning and Teaching Officer, TAFE NSW, affirmed and examined

Mr JASON DARNEY, Acting Chief Operating Officer, TAFE NSW, affirmed and examined

Ms FIONA RANKIN, Chief Information Officer, TAFE NSW, affirmed and examined

Ms REBECCA McPHEE, Deputy Secretary, Investment NSW, Premier's Department, affirmed and examined

The CHAIR: Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are joined by the Minister for the morning session only from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. In the afternoon we will hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 3.30 p.m. During these sessions there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only, and 15 minutes will be allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. With all of that said, we will throw immediately to questions from the crossbench, which is myself. Minister, I think when we last spoke in estimates we were talking about your responsibilities for universities. At the time you said:

... obviously, the universities are established under State legislation but their governance is up to the universities. They operate independently to the State Government. We don't have role in running universities per se or setting those standards ... we don't have a day-to-day involvement in telling the universities what they should be doing in that space.

I am not alone in wanting you, as tertiary education Minister, to take a more active role in holding those universities to account. I was pleased to see an article from Wednesday saying "New South Wales Government asks UTS to call off suspending teacher training". Does this herald a new age of you as Minister getting a bit more involved in what the universities are doing?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That doesn't change the position that I don't have the capacity to direct universities about what they can do. But, as I've said in previous appearances here, I certainly have a regular dialogue with university vice-chancellors about the things that are going on in the universities. As part of that, I am certainly able to ask questions about some aspects of it. That aspect of the courses relating to education was obviously of particular concern to the Department of Education as well and to the secretary, who I might ask to add to this in a moment. We were more specific in that case asking because we were concerned about the flow of teachers through into a high-demand profession in New South Wales.

I have had correspondence with the vice-chancellor about that and at some functions I've also very briefly spoken to him about that aspect particularly. It remains the case that while the legislation comes under the State Government, it doesn't give us the power to intervene or to direct. We are seeing at the moment an expert panel on governance at Federal level. I have had a briefing from the expert panel in the last couple of weeks about their work. I am expecting to see their recommendations in October. That will give us a bit of an idea where at national level the expert panel sees there being room for improvement in governance and whether or not there is a role for State governments in that process.

The CHAIR: In terms of that role, accepting that the legislation currently doesn't give you the authority to direct and give orders, there is a lot you can do at a State level, isn't there? The two biggest bits of leverage that you have is your ability to suggest changes to those Acts that govern the universities, particularly around the objects and how they should be run. Also, you have direct power of appointment over a number of people in the governance structure. Given that, do you accept that even if you don't currently have direct powers, you have significant leverage over these universities in trying to encourage them to do the right thing?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Federal government, through its powers, took over the primary responsibility for universities some time ago and, through its funding, obviously has the biggest levers in this space. I am aware that Dr Kaine, with other members, has initiated an inquiry in the upper House around universities at the moment in New South Wales. Obviously while I don't have powers to direct, Committee members this afternoon have the

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powers to question and do so through your capacities as well. I do absolutely have the power to appoint two people to each of the boards. That's the current status. In doing that, the Government since Labor came to government has made it clear that we expect those appointees to have significant relevant experience in education and equity issues.

That's a change over previous situations. The reason we did that is because we were concerned that boards needed to have more people on them who had direct educational experience. That indicates the Government's position on that. I've talked about that in previous hearings. As with any board, though, the appointees from government aren't directed by government. They operate, once they're on the board, in the interests of the institution and the organisation on the councils.

The CHAIR: You do still have the leverage of being able to change—and you have already in your term of government—the legislation applicable to universities. You could theoretically, could you not, make a change to, for example, the overall objectives for how these universities are governing themselves? There are all sorts of things you could do. That must give you some leverage over these universities when it comes to your influence.

Mr STEVE WHAN: There's a question here about how much government direction we should be seeing in universities. I don't think in the long term that would be a particularly good precedent to establish. I am going to be very interested to see what comes out of the recommendations from the expert panel on governance and whether or not that does have implications for the New South Wales legislation. I'd suggest that it's probably worth waiting until that expert panel has delivered its findings.

The CHAIR: When it comes to these what I think most people would think of as vital public institutions, despite the increasing corporatisation, it was comforting to see a clear statement made by yourself in relation to the cutting of teaching courses. Clearly it's also in the public interest to preserve the quality of the teaching staff at these universities as well. Are you going to be making a similar statement or warning to the universities in relation to the 1,400 jobs that are under threat across the universities in New South Wales this year?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I am not going to be intervening in the day-to-day management of the universities. It's not appropriate for me to do that. We do need to recognise that, right across all organisations, sometimes they do restructure. You would expect that they do that in a way that is consultative with their workforce and that provides good information. The New South Wales Government, in a number of areas, is also undertaking similar programs. It's difficult to say to any institution that you shouldn't be. I want to note that, in this last series of annual reports, six out of 10 of our universities in New South Wales made losses. Some have made multi-year losses. We need to go back and look at the changes to funding which were introduced by the Morrison Government which clearly disadvantaged some courses. Universities are not recouping—

The CHAIR: That's quite a long time ago now. I don't think we can hang our hat on—

Mr STEVE WHAN: They're still the funding arrangements in place. The reality of the way that our universities have operated in Australia for some time is that they cross-subsidise courses through overseas student income. They cross-subsidise research as well through that income. When that has had disruptions, that's certainly upset the funding basis of universities. What we did see out of that Morrison Government-era reform was a situation where many degrees, particularly arts degrees, are not valued in the way that many of us think that they should be. We've seen a number of universities, unfortunately, cutting courses in those areas as a result of that.

The CHAIR: Your party has been in the Federal government now for—we're in the fourth year. We can't really be relying on the mistakes of previous governments to excuse this one. I think we can all agree that there needs to be more funding provided by the Federal Government.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Let's be clear that the universities accord process has highlighted a number of these issues, which the Federal Government over time is looking to deal with. It's certainly a topic of conversation with the Federal Minister when we have ministerial council meetings. We certainly talk about a number of these issues. With the budget considerations that the Commonwealth Government has, over time I think all of us would expect to see the Commonwealth addressing those issues.

The CHAIR: On the back of the comments you've just made about not getting involved in the day-to-day affairs of universities, can you explain this AFR article? The headline is "NSW government asks UTS to call off suspending teacher training". What is the difference between that and a headline that says "NSW government asks UTS to call off suspending teachers"? Why is it that you can ask them to call off suspending teacher training but not ask them to not sack all of the teachers?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The issue there is that we were concerned about the pipeline of teachers coming into the New South Wales system, essentially. It was directly relevant. I'll ask the secretary to elaborate on why. He also has had conversations with the university vice-chancellor.

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MURAT DIZDAR: I want to thank the vice-chancellor. I met with the vice-chancellor when I became aware of the temporary suspension of teacher education courses. We have worked really hard with every university in New South Wales to establish strong working structures and relationships. In fact, through the department, we've employed a relationship manager and we've been deploying them at every university. When I came through the University of Sydney, I only met the department in my interview in my final year. I want that to be a closer relationship. I did express my concern to the vice-chancellor in the meeting around the temporary suspension and whether that would become an end-state position. We have a very strong track record with UTS graduates. The faculty is an exemplary faculty and produces outstanding graduates in not only my sector but the Catholic and independent sectors.

The CHAIR: Just to interrupt you, because there's limited time, I agree with all of that, but we're not getting to the point of the academic teaching cuts. I'll go to some more specific questions for the Minister. Since 4 April 2023 how many meetings have you or your office held with each of the vice-chancellors at the public universities in New South Wales?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll take on notice the specific number. I have met with all of them since I became Minister. I meet regularly with them. On regular occasions, I meet with the vice-chancellors as a collective group. I also meet with the vice-chancellors individually when I visit their universities. I'd have to take on notice the number of meetings, but I've certainly met with them all at one stage or another.

The CHAIR: Yes, if you could come back on notice with that. Since that time, have you had meetings or correspondence in relation to the restructures particularly?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have had correspondence with the vice-chancellors of several universities, who have informed me about aspects of their restructures by way of information. I have responded in fairly general terms to that correspondence. I've had meetings with Charles Sturt University face to face, who were briefing me on what they were doing. As I say, it's not within the Government's capacity to direct universities, and nor should we. A university council is responsible for the management of its university. We need to leave that responsibility for the management of the university with the university council.

The CHAIR: Even if there is evidence that there has been mismanagement or poor decisions being made at universities that you've established under legislation?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think that establishing a precedent that says that a government could direct universities would be a very dangerous thing to do.

The CHAIR: I'm not sure anyone is saying that there needs to be a direction. What we're asking for is a bit more of a hands-on approach to making sure that these institutions are acting in accordance with their objectives and in accordance with the expectations of the people of New South Wales.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I really don't know what the difference between "a hands-on approach" and "directing" is.

The CHAIR: I could explain it.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Let's be really clear: Governments should not be involved in the day-to-day running of universities any more than they're involved in the day-to-day running of—

The CHAIR: Just consultant firms and—

Mr STEVE WHAN: —business enterprises. Universities' councils have to make decisions in the best interests of their institutions. They should be doing that. It's no different to any other organisation with a board around Australia. You wouldn't expect to see direct engagement from government.

The CHAIR: I think you've just hit the nail on the head, haven't you? This is not a corporation; this is a public institution that we, as a Parliament—

Mr STEVE WHAN: This is a public institution, with a governing council.

The CHAIR: Just a minute. I haven't finished my comment and question. We are talking about institutions where, as a government, if you are looking at those institutions and deciding that actually they're not being run appropriately, you have the levers to change a whole bunch of rules in relation to governance under these Acts. Are you saying that it's just completely hands off, there will be no reform, it doesn't matter what they do. They can use as many consultants as they like and fire as many people as they like, and it is just not your responsibility?

Mr STEVE WHAN: As I've said, there are a number of Federal bodies, including the Australian Tertiary Education Commission, which will be an independent steward for a number of areas of the system. The Federal Government will be looking at some of those aspects. We've got the expert council on governance, which is

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coming back. But should we be involved in directing universities about how they manage their institutions? No, we should not.

The CHAIR: You keep saying that as though that was the question, which it clearly was not.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Maybe Donald Trump might agree with your interventionist approach, but I do not.

The CHAIR: Here we go. I love that. Someone has handed you that on a piece of paper, I'm sure. I have never at any point talked about you directing these universities. If you could instead answer my direct question, which was—

Mr STEVE WHAN: Your direct question is about whether or not you think that we should be directly engaging with universities to tell them what to do in this space and, no, we shouldn't.

The CHAIR: Again, you have reframed my question in a way that suits you so you can answer it in a way that avoids responsibility for governance of universities.

Mr STEVE WHAN: As I have said to you, we have an expert panel on the governance of universities, which is due to report soon. It would be sensible to wait for that to see what they recommend.

The CHAIR: With respect, that's a far more sensible answer.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Which is actually what I said quite some time ago.

The CHAIR: No, you keep answering the question that I didn't ask you. When you get recommendations being handed down that say, "Can you now go and reform these bits of legislation so that we have better governance in these universities?" if in fact that is what happens, then presumably you will then move to amend these bits of legislation to ensure that the governance structures are more appropriate? Is that what will happen?

Mr STEVE WHAN: If the expert panel makes recommendations which involve the State legislation governing universities, then obviously I'd be taking those into account and responding to them.

The CHAIR: Because you do have that power to change that legislation to actually require a better governance structure for these universities.

Mr STEVE WHAN: But, to be clear, that doesn't mean that we could say to them, "You should manage your university in this way."

The CHAIR: No. Again, no-one has asked you that question. If we could come back to specifics, do you know how many jobs are at risk across the 10 public universities in New South Wales?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I might have to ask Mr Kurucz—

JEREMY KURUCZ: We will take it on notice, that specific figure.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We'll take the total figure on notice. I am aware, certainly, of a number of the universities that have spoken to me about this. Wollongong university has just made some comments today about their total number of jobs that they are losing.

The CHAIR: It's around 1,400. These are 1,400 individuals. It's a bit concerning that you're not aware of that—

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think you might find that Wollongong's has gone down today from their original estimate.

The CHAIR: By how much?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's now around a hundred, as I understand it.

The CHAIR: From?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll take on notice the actual numbers so that I'm not just plucking them out of my memory.

The CHAIR: Do you have a current estimate of how many courses, majors or degrees have been cut or proposed to be cut in New South Wales universities since your Government has been in power?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, not off the top of my head. I'll have to take that on notice as well. But I'd also encourage you to ask the vice-chancellors this afternoon, when you have them in front of you.

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The CHAIR: We will. Has the department modelled the impacts of the restructures on regional communities, in particular, and regional economies where universities are major employers—so WSU, CSU, UOW, UON and SCU, in particular?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, and I don't think that is a role for government to do that.

The CHAIR: So there's no management of the economy from the government of the day?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Let's be very clear. University councils need to manage their universities. The Government cannot be undertaking the day-to-day management of universities.

The CHAIR: Are you concerned, Minister, about the current state of the university sector in New South Wales?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I am concerned about the viability of the sector in New South Wales.

The CHAIR: Just not concerned enough to do anything.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have expressed that concern a number of times in relation to the changes to overseas student income, or the fact that we have seen this year six out of 10 universities making losses and the year before eight out of 10 universities making losses. So, yes, I am concerned about that.

The CHAIR: It's almost like their governance structures aren't operating in the right way.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It could also be about the funding model that we have. It could be about the changes to overseas student income. It could be a range of issues. I've certainly heard a number of things canvassed. But, again, the university councils should have the expertise on them to be making the governance decisions of their own institutions.

The CHAIR: They should.

Mr STEVE WHAN: To be really clear, if you are running an organisation which is running a deficit, you would be a very irresponsible university council that didn't take action to actually rectify that.

The CHAIR: You probably wouldn't just cut all of your teachers, though, would you? Anyway. Given that you are the tertiary education Minister in New South Wales, have you developed or are you considering the development of an action plan or a response regarding the crisis that is engulfing New South Wales's universities right now?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I am not considering the creation of an action plan by government, no.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Good morning, Minister. Thanks for being here, as well as your officials. Minister, I want to start with some quite specific questions from the budget papers. Do you have a copy with you? It might be easier if you've got them there.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I can access them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I just want to take you to the agency financial statements for TAFE.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, go ahead and ask the question.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The employee-related or personnel expenses, they are down in 2025-26 compared to what the revised budget was for 2024-25. Can you tell me why that's the case?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Are you comparing the budget to actual?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: No, the budget last year was about \$1.5 billion; the revised was about \$1.622 billion. But this year the budget allocation is \$1.609 billion. It's down a bit, and I was just curious as to why the budget this year is less than the revised budget that was obviously spent last year. I wonder if you could talk me through that.

Mr STEVE WHAN: When you look at the budgeted amounts, we've actually seen a 23 per cent increase in TAFE's recurrent budget from your last budget in 2022-23.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But I'm just specifically asking about that figure in your own budget paper.

Mr STEVE WHAN: In terms of employee numbers, which I think is quite important, we've seen an increase in employee numbers in TAFE since this Government came in.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It's a very specific question to the budget paper. If you had it in front of you, it might be easier to see. The revised budget, which was the actual spend, on employee-related expenses

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last year, as I said, was about \$1.622 billion. This year the budget allocated is \$1.609 billion. I'm just curious about that difference and wondered if you could talk me through it.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The TAFE budget, excluding capital, is nearly \$2.46 billion.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But I'm asking about a specific line item within that, which is the employee-related expenses and why you expect to spend a little bit less this year than you did last year, to put it in simple terms.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Ms Read to address that.

CHLOE READ: Obviously, as you can see when you look at the 2024-25 results, there's often quite a movement in the employee expenses for TAFE. That's because, largely, obviously we have our permanent workforce and that profile has changed quite dramatically over the last year or so as we've moved through that process of casual teachers into permanent roles. As part of that, we then go through a process of educational delivery planning, and we need to make assumptions and projections about the types of delivery that we're doing—things like the Adult Migrant English Program contract, the number of casuels we might need to employ to service demand, those kinds of things.

The budget is up by quite a lot on the starting point for 2024-25. Obviously it's slightly down on the landing point for 2024-25, but that reflects a period of transition where we both incurred additional costs because we converted a whole bunch of people from being casual to permanent but also still had a high base of casual teachers. We're doing a lot of work to make sure that, for example, in our permanent teaching base, which is now I think around 85 per cent of our staff—

Mr STEVE WHAN: Up from under 50 per cent, under the previous Government.

CHLOE READ: —are fully utilised before we then hire casuels. It's just a bit about that workforce balance. Then, of course, you know we've made some operating model changes, and some of those do result in changes in the profile of funding, although they're not massively driven by achieving lots of savings.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that the 100 job cuts, Minister? Is that one of the changes that gets picked up in those operating expenses?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The current stage two of the operating model is where we have around about 100 job cuts overall—net—and that's something which I have flagged previously through restructuring in TAFE. We've actually had a net increase in TAFE employees since we came to government—quite significant net increase—and of course 3,500 converted from casual to permanent, which results in a significant increase in resources. As part of that operating model changes, we'll be able to utilise some of non-teaching hours to do things like curriculum development and so on.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might come to that a little bit later. I do have some questions about that. Just picking up on something you said, Ms Read, there were some sort of one-offs by the sound of it last year, which accounts for that change in the initial budget versus revised. Are you expecting any other similar sort of one-offs this year as well?

CHLOE READ: I guess there are a few things that we might point to. Things like the Adult Migration English Program that I mentioned, that's a contract with the Federal Government that's currently in a tender process, and so obviously where that lands in terms of TAFE NSW's responsibility to deliver under that contract might change that profile of delivery and therefore some of the staffing. But I don't have anything particular in mind other than those types of things, and there'll be a few examples of those.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. The grants and contributions, which is in the revenue part of that same table on that page, there's about a \$150 million increase in that compared to last year. I'm just curious as to what the basis of that is. Where does that come from?

CHLOE READ: I do have notes on this somewhere. I might take that on notice. I have a suspicion, but until I find the note, I might take that on notice if that's okay.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We might come back to that then maybe. Yes, of course, that's fine. Again, this is very detailed but I wanted to also ask about—it's on the next page, so 6-12, of those *Agency Financial Statements*—the plant and equipment funding allocation. This is from the previous year's budget. I think the budget allocation was \$231.7 million but then the revised budget ended up being 129.5. I just wondered why I guess the underspend in that particular part of the budget papers.

CHLOE READ: Yes. I think some of that relates to re-phasing of the manufacturing centres of excellence, but I can come back—

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can you explain what that means in layperson's terms, sorry.

CHLOE READ: It means that we worked with the Commonwealth on joint funding for the manufacturing centres of excellence, and for one of them it just took us a bit longer, I think, on getting that agreement in place, and so the construction moved slightly in terms of which financial year it would fall into. I don't think that explains a hole, but I could take on notice the full extent of that difference if you like.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great, thank you. I also wanted to ask about the capital expenditure. Again, the budgeted expenditure for 2024-2025 was \$300.6 million, but then, again, that was revised down to \$217 million, and I'm just wondering why.

CHLOE READ: Sorry, tell me which—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Last year's budget papers, the budgeted capital expenditure—that's from the *Infrastructure Statement* budget papers. Sorry, I should have mentioned that. That's table 6.1.

CHLOE READ: Sorry, what page are you on?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Let me find it. I have a photocopy here and I don't have my normal one. Give me one second. Sorry, I am confused. The *Agency Financial Statements*, I'm back to that one—6.1—sorry. Table 6.1 is where it lists all the different agencies obviously under Education and then under TAFE. The capital expenditure, the revised budget there says \$217 million but in last year's budget papers the allocation for that amount was 300.6, and so it appears that there's an \$80-odd million less spend.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We'll take that on notice. I suspect that it's more about delivery time frames for some of the projects.

CHLOE READ: Oh, sorry, we're in the agency summary. I think that's the same thing. I think that's the same difference that you can see in the detail of ours in the rollout—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But is that for the centres of excellence? Is that what you're saying?

Mr STEVE WHAN: In part.

CHLOE READ: In part. Let's take it on notice.

Mr STEVE WHAN: As I probably said last year, a lot of the capital was about maintenance across a very large range of sites last year, so I suspect that we've got a few different little bits in that. But we'll come back to you on that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure. Do you know then, Minister, just generally speaking in terms of any capital projects—and I appreciate sometimes things can take longer than you anticipate or weather or whatever—that didn't proceed on the schedule or that were delayed?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Apart from some of them pushing out across financial years from the sound of it, they're all happening. The Treasurer says, "Make sure you spend the money", and I'm making sure we spend the money.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Gee, normally Treasurers tell you not to spend money. But there are none that you're particularly concerned about in terms of the—

Mr STEVE WHAN: No. Obviously the manufacturing centres of excellence are reasonably big projects in conjunction with the Commonwealth. A lot of last year's were upgrade projects and maintenance projects. In this year's capital, we have a couple of terrific upgrade projects, which are reasonable large, but I'm confident they'll all be delivered.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Can I ask about a couple of more specific ones. The Coffs Harbour Optimisation Project, again, I think last year's budget papers had a completion date of 2025 and I think that has now been pushed out to 2027. Can you just talk me through why that is for that particular project?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask TAFE to address that. I've been to Coffs Harbour TAFE and seen some of the work that has been going on. There was some substantial work that has been happening there, but I'll ask TAFE to elaborate on the completion date.

CHLOE READ: For Coffs Harbour, I have "completed new and refurbished facilities to relocate creative services, Adult Migrant English Program and business courses from Glenreagh Street to Coffs Harbour", so it may be that there's a second phase. But certainly the expected delivery in FY24-25 from my notes was completed. I might just take on notice. It's probably a phase thing.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, because it's still listed in this year's budget papers. It is a work in progress. But it does say "complete 2027" and last year it said "complete 2025".

Mr STEVE WHAN: I did turn a sod on a new building there and I haven't opened it yet.

CHLOE READ: There you go. Let me take that away. Thanks.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, I was just curious if there was any particular delay. That would be good. In terms of overall upgrades, there was a release that you put out, Minister, around the budget time, where you said "\$120 million to repair TAFE campuses statewide, modernising learning, teaching spaces et cetera and upgrading 129 campuses across the State by providing new air conditioning, lights, smoke detectors, wi-fi upgrades". Can you tell me how those particular campuses were selected for that work?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Obviously TAFE has 1,700 buildings, so there's a very big task in maintenance and upgrades, and what we did find when we came into government was that maintenance had not been kept up in many of those campuses. We had roofs which were in poor condition. In many, we had wi-fi that didn't work and wasn't up to standard. It has been a big job, which we've been undertaking over the three budgets since we've been in government. We obviously prioritised those campuses. TAFE came to me with a recommendation for the priorities for that expenditure, which we've adopted. There's a huge range of projects involving information technology upgrades. For instance, the Hornsby campus, which I just visited the other day, is getting a full new roof and refurbishment of its carpentry section, and that's a big job obviously. There were many cases where roofs needed to be repaired and those sorts of things, but it has all been done. The program has all been based on TAFE's recommendations to me about priority.

CHLOE READ: I was just going to add there are a couple of things in that. One is that most of the priority goes through a triage process that you would expect, so health and safety making sure we have the right facilities in terms of compliance with the training packages—those kinds of things—and critical need where you might go replace a roof and you want to make sure that roof needs to be replaced, for want of a better term. Then there's also in the IT space the continuation of the Digital Access Foundation project. We did, I think, 40 TAFE campuses in 2024-2025 and then there's another set coming in 2025-2026 to make sure that the wi-fi across all our campuses is both up to date but also has better coverage than it had before. Some of them are like rolling programs where we're working our way around almost every campus and some of them are based on that triage of where we best need those facilities' upgrades.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm assuming, with that triage process, there would be some that just need routine upgrades after so many years in terms of particular—

CHLOE READ: Yes.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, we have, as you're probably aware, a portfolio of buildings, many of which are over 50 years old, and some are over 100 years old, so they certainly bring with them a fairly strong maintenance cost.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate that. I'm happy for you to take this on notice, but of the 129 campuses that were called out in that media release, can you provide, on notice, a list of all the campuses that that work is going to be undertaken on, if possible?

CHLOE READ: Yes.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We will take that on notice.

CHLOE READ: There might just be some places where some of it is maintenance that might crop up during the year, so we might just need to flag where—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you can provide what you can, on notice, that would be great.

CHLOE READ: Yes, totally.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I just wanted to touch again on—you mentioned it before—some of the issues around the technology issues and upgrades in terms of IT and things. I don't know if it was yourself, Minister, but I think last time we talked about a digital disadvantage for some of those campuses. Again, how many are you going to do the IT upgrades on this year? Where are you at in terms of the cycle of making sure that as many campuses as possible have the digital that they need?

Mr STEVE WHAN: A decent standard of wi-fi, for example, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But that they have what they need in terms of that digital capability.

CORRECTED

Mr STEVE WHAN: We will take on notice the full list for you, but obviously we've worked through a large range of campuses that didn't have decent wi-fi access. We've also been investing in new equipment into many areas—so laptops and so on for students and staff in many of the campuses as well. There has been quite a strong investment in many of those areas. I was at the Wagga TAFE's primary industries section the other day. When I first went there last year, their wi-fi system wasn't capable, for instance, of running the—they deliver training for all the tractor manufacturers, and they need to be able to access all of those manufacturers' diagnostic systems. Their system, at the time, wasn't capable of doing that, so we've prioritised that campus. That's had an upgrade in that area. We are trying to prioritise through—the job's not done yet, but we continue to work through.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You might have said it before but, for instance, in this financial year, how many campuses are slated to have a wi-fi upgrade?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We'll provide you with that.

CHLOE READ: I'll come back on that. There will be two figures in that. One will be the wi-fi and the network infrastructure piece, but then also last year we replaced about 5,000 educational and staff devices—so computers either in computer labs or laptops that can be hired. That's a rolling thing because obviously once you get to the end, the ones you rolled out four years ago will need to be replaced. But we will give you a sense, if we can, on that too.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there an end date for when you want all campuses—it's particularly wi-fi that I'm more interested in—to be up to scratch?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Ms Read, do you want to comment on that?

CHLOE READ: I think the program is due to be completed in the next two financial years, but I'll confirm that and come back to you if that's not correct.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think that's probably right. It probably rolls around and starts again, like painting the Harbour Bridge.

CHLOE READ: Yes, it feels that way.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: It was more about wi-fi because obviously I appreciate the devices and things that you've got to upgrade as the need arises. I want to talk a little bit now about staffing, and I know, Minister, you talked particularly about casual roles transitioning into permanent roles. Can you just talk me through a little bit more about the overall staffing profile and some of the challenges around it? Are there any net changes to delivery hours? What is that looking like in this financial year?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The basis for this is that we saw a very big decrease in TAFE teachers in the period of the last Government. The TAFE workforce dropped by just under 5,000 between 2012 and 2022.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm very interested in this year's financial situation.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm sure you are.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's what we're here for. Under you, what's happening in terms of delivery hours? That's what I want to know.

Mr STEVE WHAN: What we've been doing since we came to government, one of the core parts of that is the transfer of people from insecure or casual contracts to permanent. We've gone from 49 per cent permanent, when we came to government, in the teaching workforce to around 85 per cent. All up, that's around 3½ thousand staff. That means that they then have non-teaching hours, which they're being paid to deliver, which enables us to then talk about the use of those hours and how they can assist in the rest of the management of the business, as well as doing their preparation time and those sorts of things. As part of that, we've tried to make sure that we are then of course fully utilising those permanent staff first before bringing on casuals around the State. That's not always easy. We've gone through a process, with the restructure of TAFE, of ensuring that we have a statewide system for each faculty.

That has enabled us to better coordinate the work. It is enabling us, as part of phase two of the operating model, to better coordinate the work on curriculum development, utilising the expertise that teachers and the experts in those areas have. That's quite a substantial change to the way that TAFE operates. It's really moving from, or continuing or completing the move that started in the last Government—in terms of moving to the One TAFE system but still leaving a whole lot of things regionally based—to having a faculty model which will focus, in each of those faculties, on better engaging with industry but also better engaging with communities in local areas. We have also embarked, in the education department and in TAFE, on a process of working with

CORRECTED

regional communities to identify their future skills needs and how we can better cater for those future skills needs rather than following on.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We might come back to that when I have more time, Minister.

CHLOE READ: The only thing I would add is, under that faculty model, we are really looking at faculty workforce plans. Under Paid to Learn, we might talk later about focusing that on industries of critical skills need. Since the middle of 2022 we've got about 400 additional teachers, so we're also really looking at the balancing of staffing across TAFE and trying to make sure that we have teachers for critical skills where we need them, along with the support staff that help us deliver education across the State.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Good morning, Minister. I'm sure you know what I'm going to ask.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It wouldn't be about Bankstown, would it?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes. You need some MP to ask about it because the current member for Bankstown couldn't care less. I'm going to ask you if you can tell me how many times have you visited the Western Sydney University's new premises that you're going to have TAFE at?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Can I start off with your editorial comment there? I've had many discussions with the member for Bankstown and the member for East Hills, Jihad Dib and Kylie Wilkinson, about TAFE provision in the area.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Onsite at the Western Sydney University—have you been there onsite?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I've been working very closely with them to make sure—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, have you been there onsite with them? Have you been there onsite?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I've been to the existing Bankstown TAFE campus on a number of occasions.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: When was the last time you went to Bankstown TAFE at the current location, then, if you want to answer that?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Just a few weeks ago, actually.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Did you pop over to Western Sydney to have a look at where the new location is going to be?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I've seen the tower, and Ms Read has actually inspected—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Everyone can see the tower. It's very high.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order: We've only just started with Ms Mihailuk's questions and, as such, the Minister hasn't had the chance to answer any of the questions that she has peppered him with. I'm sure they are completely legitimate, but if we could have them one at a time so the Minister could answer.

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Have you visited the Western Sydney tower, inside the building, to have a look at where the new TAFE will be?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Ms Read was there on Monday, looking at the work that's being done to upgrade it.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But did you have a look at it, Minister? Have you had a good look?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We've actually just—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So the answer's no?

Mr STEVE WHAN: —started the process of upgrading the tower. The great thing for Bankstown in this—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: It's a refurbished new building already, Minister.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Let's go back to square one on this.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: My question to you required a yes or no answer.

The CHAIR: Order!

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You've answered it. The answer is no. You don't want to say no, but you haven't visited the tower.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think you've been in politics long enough to know that—

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order—

Mr STEVE WHAN: If anybody has—

The CHAIR: Order! Sorry, Minister. I need to hear the point of order.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: My point of order is that Ms Mihailuk seems to be flouting your ruling about allowing the Minister to answer questions without peppering him with the next ones.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: To the point of order: Madam Chair, the question required a very specific yes or no answer. In fact, I think the Minister is taking the opportunity just to—

The CHAIR: I do agree that the Minister had not yet answered the question, but he had not been able to give more than half a sentence. I remind the Minister to please be directly relevant to the question, but the member will allow him to speak a couple of sentences before trying to interject.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Have you visited the tower?

Mr STEVE WHAN: First of all, I want to make the point that what we are going to have at Bankstown is a really exciting development in that tower. It will be fitted out. It is going to include new courses for Bankstown in health, which is a really exciting development of the delivery of a health campus in the area. The Government has committed over \$2 billion to a new hospital.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, I have read all that.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think it's important to understand the context of this.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, you're not answering my question.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think I have answered your question.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: My specific question is whether you've visited the tower—

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm looking forward to—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: —where you're now going to put \$100 million in Western Sydney. You're giving them \$100 million to refurbish—

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, that's not a correct figure.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: —a newly built building. This is a building that was just opened in Western Sydney. It's a \$340 million building that they received as a result of a dollar lease arrangement with the council. The development was paid for by developers. That's fine. They've got a great arrangement there. But it's a new building. Of the \$100 million, how much has been provided over the next four financial years? How are you divvying up that \$100 million?

Mr STEVE WHAN: One of your comments at the start there wasn't correct. There is not \$100 million going to the Western Sydney University.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You can tell me what it is.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The people of Bankstown will have a terrific opportunity for a campus at the Western Sydney University.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How much is the TAFE getting?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll come to that, if you'd let me. This project includes a number of aspects to it. There is the Western Sydney University tower cost and there is the relocation of a number of courses to Padstow and the refurbishment of the site. Kylie Wilkinson, the local member, has been speaking to me about her desire to see a lot more delivered at the Padstow campus. I'm very excited that's happening. So around \$30 million of the \$100 million will be spent on the relocation of teaching at Padstow.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Sorry, say that again. Thirty million to Padstow?

CORRECTED

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, that's correct.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: In the budget, it does say \$100 million in capital works in the budget line.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Correct.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: And it says Bankstown specifically there.

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's for the project as a whole—the relocation of TAFE. Around \$40 million will be spent on the relocation to WSU tower and the fit-out. Yes, it's a new building, but if you're going to deliver a nursing course in there, you've obviously got to have specific facilities for it. If you're going to deliver hairdressing in there, you've got to have specific facilities for it.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But don't you think you should visit it, Minister? Why don't you have a good look at it yourself? Wouldn't you like to visit it yourself?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will visit it.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Then you'll see how new it is yourself. Perhaps you might save some money for the taxpayer.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Are you saying that because a building is new, it doesn't need to have the specific training facilities incorporated? I think that's a fairly ridiculous point.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, what I'm saying is I want to make sure you're spending the taxpayer money wisely and not just handing over a blank cheque to the Western Sydney University, which is what it seems like you're doing at the moment.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think that's completely incorrect. I will hand over to Ms Read in a moment.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm not asking Ms Read a question.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think it's important that in your editorial commentary in this there is some degree of truth and accuracy. We've gone through tender processes on this—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Well, I've been asking you questions for a very long time on this issue and you weren't very truthful at the last budget estimates, Minister.

Mr STEVE WHAN: —and we've gone through costings of the fit-out.

The CHAIR: Order!

Mr STEVE WHAN: If you're going to deliver nursing in a facility, having a new building doesn't mean you've got the beds and facilities.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I accept that you need to do some fit-out—

Mr STEVE WHAN: So, yes, you do need to do the fit-out.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: —but we're trying to get down to how much you're going to do. Who is going to do the fit-out, Minister?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I would've thought representing—

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order—

The CHAIR: Before I hear the point of order, it is really hard for Hansard to work out who is speaking when everyone is speaking at the same time. We need a little bit of backwards and forwards, which means we need to allow each other time to speak. Was that going to be the point of order?

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: That was going to be the general tenor of it.

The CHAIR: Then I uphold your point of order.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Can I complete my answer on this point? The process that we've gone through here has included going to market for tenders and going to market with tenders for the fit-out. We are confident we've got a competitive outcome financially for the taxpayers. Very importantly, we'll also have a state-of-the-art facility, including provision for delivery of courses which currently aren't being delivered in Bankstown. That's a

CORRECTED

really important outcome. I know that Jihad Dib, the local member, is very excited about having a new hospital and new TAFE facilities. Kylie Wilkinson, the local member for East Hills, is very excited about it as well.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: They should move into the area. How about that? Minister, on 15 July Kylie Wilkinson said on her Facebook that Padstow was getting \$20 million. So she's wrong? It's getting \$30 million?

Mr STEVE WHAN: In our planning at the moment, we have \$30 million.

CHLOE READ: That's right.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Ms Read can elaborate on that.

CHLOE READ: That's a rounded-up figure. We can give you the specifics, if you like.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Perhaps you want to advise the member for East Hills that she's got an extra \$10 million.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm in constant contact with Ms Wilkinson about this, because she is such a strong advocate for Padstow TAFE.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You should've given her the right advice, then.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Well, give her the right advice.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It is a fabulous facility. I'm really excited about the work that's been done to refurbish areas which were closed down recently and haven't been utilised appropriately for some time.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can you now make public who is doing the fit-out for Bankstown TAFE? Is that now publicly available?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Ms Read to answer that.

CHLOE READ: Yes. It's on the eTendering website.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can you give me the name of the company?

CHLOE READ: The contractor is—I'm just looking at it so I get it right—Schiavello Construction.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: As far as you know, are they getting the whole \$40 million to do the fit-out? You could take that on notice.

CHLOE READ: Sorry. I'm looking at the wrong thing.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: The wrong thing? Okay.

CHLOE READ: The tender notification itself says a bit over \$28.3 million.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, what's happening with the other \$12 million that you mentioned earlier?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I said that the overall budget for the relocation is \$40 million. Then there will be \$25 million on rental costs over the period that we've got the agreement for.

CHLOE READ: That will be over about five years.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Twenty-five million in rental?

CHLOE READ: That's about five years.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Over five years.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Twenty-five million in rental cost—

Mr STEVE WHAN: Correct.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: —to a university that doesn't pay any rent? They got this for free from the ratepayers of Bankstown.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We market-tested this—

CHLOE READ: It's had an independent valuation as well.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's had an independent valuation. The independent valuation supported this.

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Wow! You had a site that was for free at the current Bankstown site that cost you nothing. You didn't pay rent. You've now decided to go to a site that you're going to pay \$25 million for for five years rent.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think the people of Bankstown will be very excited about the fact that they're getting an over \$2 billion state-of-the-art hospital located in the town centre.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I don't think the people of Bankstown want their taxpayer money wasted like this either. You're handing this over to the Western Sydney University, right? That is unbelievable—\$25 million.

Mr STEVE WHAN: You can editorialise all you want on that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: It's the first I've heard of it. No-one knows you're paying that kind of level of rent when you had a site that was free before.

Mr STEVE WHAN: My interest in this is providing fabulous vocational training for the people of the Bankstown region.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You owned the site previously.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Wow! Minister, I asked you some questions on notice previously. I will turn to them now. One of them was about section 32C (3) of the Western Sydney University Act, which states:

The Board must comply with any request by the Minister to provide the Minister with a copy of the Register or any extract from the Register.

At that time you said you hadn't sought that. Have you ever asked for that since?

Mr STEVE WHAN: In respect to their commercial investments?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes.

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, I haven't.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You've had an opportunity to ask that question. Are you not interested in obtaining that?

Mr STEVE WHAN: If there's something which is specifically raised with me, a specific commercial project, then I wouldn't rule out asking questions about it.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But this is a major commercial project that you're overseeing right now. Why wouldn't you want to get some more details?

Mr STEVE WHAN: About the Bankstown tower?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes. You would want to know that there are other commercial activities because you're going to be a significant player in the commercial arm of the Western Sydney University, given that you're going to take a \$25 million lease arrangement over eight floors for five years.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We're going to be a tenant. I don't see what that has to do with me asking further questions on that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What about section 32D of the Western Sydney University Act, which I also asked you about?

Mr STEVE WHAN: As I said before, we did have the amount we are paying as rent independently tested. When we ask the universities questions—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: The Auditor-General didn't test it. Who was the one that independently tested it?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, sorry. We had a market test done of the value of that rent. That is consistent with market value in the area.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I don't know of anyone that pays that kind of rent in Bankstown. Give me a break.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I don't know. How many organisations do you talk to that actually—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Who did the market valuation?

CORRECTED

Mr STEVE WHAN: I don't know how many organisations you talk to that are renting this amount of space.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm asking who did the market valuation.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Who did the market valuation for you or your office, Minister?

CHLOE READ: It would've been for TAFE. I've just got that it was an independent valuation. I can certainly find out and take it on notice.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We can take on notice who undertook it.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: If you can take it on notice, I'd like to know who it was. Hopefully they visited the site. Minister, I doubt you would have exercised your right under section 32D of the Western Sydney University Act to request a report from the board as to the university's commercial activity. If you didn't ask for the register, have you since requested a report? You can answer that. Have you requested a report from the Western Sydney University about any commercial—

Mr STEVE WHAN: About their commercial activities broadly? All their commercial activities? No, I have not.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Any of theirs?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, not at this stage.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: No problem; it's all hunky-dory! Just hand them over \$25 million.

Mr STEVE WHAN: But we get their annual reports, which the Auditor-General considers, and that is the normal process. Of course, members can ask the vice-chancellors direct questions this afternoon.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I will absolutely be doing that. Thank you, Minister. I note that he's the person that was first honest in advising this Committee that, indeed, they did tender. On the last occasion when I asked you, you weren't prepared to give any information to this Committee. Interestingly enough, he did advise us that the Western Sydney University had expressed an ROI interest.

Mr STEVE WHAN: In providing the accommodation for TAFE, yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes, but I asked you at the time—you might recall—you said it was all commercial in confidence. You provided that answer. Are you aware of the sale price of the land previously owned by the university at Milperra? Do you know what that sale price is, Minister?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will ask Mr Kurucz to add to that. It's my understanding that the role we have in land is, where there has been land provided to a university at a lower than market rate—in other words, \$1 land—in that case, the Minister then has to approve the sale of that land. That Milperra site all occurred before I was Minister, is my memory, but I'll ask Mr Kurucz if he could elaborate on that.

JEREMY KURUCZ: I'll take that on notice in relation to the specific example you've raised, Ms Mihailuk.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So you don't know if at any point the university offered to the New South Wales Government to gift Milperra land, that it was actually gifted? Because it was actually gifted in 1997 by the New South Wales Government then. I'm just wondering, did they give it back to the taxpayer?

JEREMY KURUCZ: I don't have that specific information in front of me in relation to that particular piece of land, so I'll take that on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Back on the tower issue, Minister, you said there were additional courses. Of the courses that are currently at Bankstown TAFE, I think all the animal husbandry related courses are going to Padstow. Is that right? I think you mentioned that. Perhaps, Ms Read, you mentioned that last time, on that occasion.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have, yes. I will just list it. Animal studies, early childhood and some general purpose areas for some of the business courses will be going to Padstow. The additional courses that we'll be offering in the Bankstown tower are around the health sector. We're recognising the fact that it is going to be a really important health precinct, and we will be offering courses which we don't currently offer at Bankstown in the nursing and allied health fields.

CORRECTED

CHLOE READ: Particularly nursing, noting that we have to get a special type of accreditation to do that, so we'll have to work through that once the facilities are built, and then we'll be looking to offer nursing from Bankstown at the Western Sydney tower.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm just trying to understand, if \$30 million is going to Padstow TAFE, what are you exactly doing there to fit out on the existing TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll get Ms Read to answer specifically, but there are some buildings there which require substantial refurbishment to be put to use.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Which I accept. I accept that. It's an ageing building.

Mr STEVE WHAN: So the \$30 million is the allocation for that. I have to say, in the 25 years or so I've been around politics, the cost of capital has increased so substantially that it is a bit mind blowing at times. Ms Read can actually—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I understand why you might need to spend money on Padstow TAFE; I don't understand why you need to spend to the degree that you're spending on a refurbished new Western Sydney tower. But I have been to Padstow TAFE. I do understand that is an ageing, dilapidated building and is in desperate need of an upgrade. How much of the \$30 million, Minister, is specifically for the fit-outs? Has that already gone out to tender?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It has.

CHLOE READ: It has, but we're just finalising that part. If you've been to Padstow, you might recall there's an area that was used for landscaping. There's basically a big open shed with a sandpit area and what used to be, many years ago, an automotive area. That's going to be refurbished into those specialist animal facilities, so simulated operating theatres. There'll be labs—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But it's already gone to tender? You can now publicly say if you can advise—

CHLOE READ: We're just at the end of that process. It will be the website.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's in the process. So, no, we haven't got it public.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Will that then be ready for 2026? Is that the plan for Padstow TAFE?

CHLOE READ: Yes. And then it has also got the places to put the animals and then pathology areas as well. In the early childhood space, you need specialist facilities to do that kind of simulated training environment, so it's play areas, child bathrooms and nappy changing areas. There are some outdoor works associated with that too, because obviously the outdoor space element for early childhood is really important. You might remember—I don't know if you were in the area where the library is. There's a lot of—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That's all right, Ms Read. We can talk about this in the afternoon. Can I just go back to the Minister. Minister, I'm confident that you're going to put some courses and so forth at Padstow TAFE and at Bankstown—let's hope we retain most of the courses there too. Minister, what are the number of students currently enrolled at Bankstown TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll have ask Ms Read to answer the specific number of enrolments at the moment.

CHLOE READ: It's around 5,000 in 2024.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Are you expecting that will continue to next year?

CHLOE READ: Yes, largely. Noting, of course, early childhood—when that's at Padstow and study is at Padstow, those enrolments would be there.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: If they're ready by the start of 2026.

CHLOE READ: But then we would have additional enrolments when we offer nursing and the courses that we haven't previously offered there too.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, are you still committed to finding a permanent location for Bankstown TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We will be finding a permanent location in the Bankstown town centre. At this stage I don't have information on what the process will be for that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: There isn't anyone involved in the office still searching for a permanent site, or has that been parked temporarily?

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Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Ms Read to talk about the process there.

CHLOE READ: Obviously the process approaching government to fund the relocation—now that that is underway, we're working on the separate business case that will give government options on where we will be in Bankstown beyond that five-year period that we've got for the relocation. That development is underway.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: The reason I keep asking about the commercial activities is because there are very specific arrangements between Western Sydney University and Canterbury-Bankstown so that they can retain this \$1—this peppercorn rent that they pay to the council. There's a limit to how much use of their site can be commercial. Are you across any of that type of detail or not?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, I am not across any arrangements between Western Sydney University and the council.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to go back, Minister, to the teaching staff issue that I was asking you about previously. Did you say that there were 400 additional teachers? Is that the figure that you gave?

CHLOE READ: I think I did—since mid-2022.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, what does that mean in terms of how many more hours of face-to-face teaching is now provided, if you've got 400 more teachers?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Do you mean individually per teacher or in terms of—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'll take whatever you can give me.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Individually, each teacher has a set number of hours per week—20 hours—that they are able to deliver.

CHLOE READ: However, some of those teachers might be part-time. I don't know that we would have that level of granularity on additional hours, but it's 20 hours a week.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think what you're saying is: Are we offering more?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You can say it's wonderful there are 400 more teachers, but what does that mean in practice?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Are we offering more? Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's the net increase in delivery hours? I guess that would be another way to phrase it.

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's quite specific. I would have to take that on notice. Because it obviously depends on demand and where we've got people doing courses and those sort of things. There's quite a lot of different factors in that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sure, but is there more delivery available or less?

CHLOE READ: I think that you have to look at the whole profile. In converting casual teachers to permanent, we also changed the balance of hours that they can deliver. You have more teachers, but you also have a different profile of hours. Our permanent teachers teach 20 hours a week and then have 15 of what's called "related duties". Casual teachers have different arrangements—I think up to eight hours.

JULIE TICKLE: Six hours and 20 minutes for related duties.

CHLOE READ: There you go: six hours and 20 minutes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And how many teaching hours, Ms Tickle?

JULIE TICKLE: The casual teachers don't have a set number of teaching hours they can do. The full-time teachers teach 20 hours and have 15 hours related duties, so it's a total of 35 hours. The casual teachers aren't capped in the same way.

CHLOE READ: And obviously—

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What would be the minimum hours that a casual would do in, say, a week?

JULIE TICKLE: Three.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And then a maximum?

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JULIE TICKLE: It depends on the requirements. I think the average is about 12 to 15, but I'm doing that off the top of my head.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine. And then they get how many hours of the sort of—

JULIE TICKLE: Six hours and 20 minutes. That's as per the enterprise agreement: six hours and 20 minutes.

CHLOE READ: You can understand, casual teachers often retain a role in industry and teach for us like a day a week or something, so it's really hard to say—

Mr STEVE WHAN: And there is still an important—there are people for whom going to permanent doesn't suit. So we'll still have the casual element of the workforce.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: To the average person walking down the street, they might hear you, as Minister, go, "There are 400 more TAFE teachers." But if that doesn't actually equate to more offerings in more courses and more face-to-face time for students, it doesn't really mean much, does it, Minister?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Sure. I'd note, of course, we're a demand-driven organisation so, to a large extent, we do see shifts each year. We're seeing continuations increasing in some areas. We see some courses, depending on funding arrangements and fee-free arrangements—we see demand change over the years. But we're still training over 400,000 at the moment.

CHLOE READ: Thereabouts.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Thereabouts.

CHLOE READ: I think the piece I mentioned on the Paid to Learn and the faculty workforce planning is really important to think about here because Paid to Learn is very specifically training teachers for those critical skills areas. We have had over 300?

JULIE TICKLE: Yes, that's right, and that might be handy, Ms Mitchell. Just over 300 Paid to Learn teachers across the years of 2023 and 2024. So far in 2025, they've added just over 225,000 teaching hours. That gives you an idea of the impact of the extra teachers.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's been the overall change in headcount from 2022, or even from this year to last year?

CHLOE READ: I might take that on notice for the 2022 piece. You're talking headcount across everyone?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, for the last couple of years.

CHLOE READ: I might take that on notice.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's fine. Does anyone move to a contract-based employment?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We have a figure of 1,426 increase in full-time equivalent staff between 2022 and 2024.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you could provide the breakdown of that on notice, that would be great. Do you have contract-based employment?

CHLOE READ: Do you mean a fixed term, like a two-year?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

JULIE TICKLE: We don't have it in the same way that the department has it, but we do have temporary teachers. We have full-time permanent teachers, temporary teachers who work a full-time or a part-time load, permanent part-time teachers and casual teachers, which we call part-time casual teachers just to confuse you. But they are casual teachers.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Sounds like an agency to do that. I say that with respect. You said at the beginning, Minister, about the opportunity to convert from casual to permanent. Do you have any data on how many teachers have chosen not to do that? As you said, some people probably prefer the casual roles.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll pass over to Ms Tickle to answer that, but, yes, there are teachers who going to permanent doesn't suit, particularly when they are still working in industry. One of the things we've been trying to do in some regional and mining areas, particularly, is work with industry about getting people who continue to work in that sector to actually become part-time TAFE teachers because we continue to lose teachers into higher paying jobs in those industries. So that's one of the things we've been trying to do. Perhaps Ms Tickle could elaborate on that.

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JULIE TICKLE: As the Minister said, we've had just under 3,500 employees convert; 94 per cent of those have been in our teaching ranks. I don't have the conversion rate in front of me, but around 75 to 80 per cent of the teachers opted to convert. They didn't all convert to a full-time load, so some of them have converted and they're now part-time. They may do 10 hours a week and stay in industry for a period of time as well in their week. But we did have some teachers who didn't choose to convert as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's their choice? They're not being forced to?

JULIE TICKLE: That's right.

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, nothing is being forced.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I guess, particularly in some industries, you would want them to still have that ongoing—you would encourage it almost?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We do expect all of our teachers to retain industry currency. That's a really critical part of why TAFE is able to offer the quality of its education.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Back quickly to Paid to Learn, which you just mentioned as well, Ms Tickle. When we were here in March we were talking about another tranche of those positions in Broken Hill. I think Wagga was another area. You gave me the overall figures, but do you have a breakdown of where those positions are?

CHLOE READ: Yes, I met with cohort seven, who have just started Paid to Learn in the last couple of weeks. They're spread all across the State, so we've got Albury, Ballina, Bankstown, Broken Hill, Cessnock and Kurri. In fact, I think we talked last time about Kurri Kurri and the mobile plant and heavy vehicles. There were two people; I was sitting at a table with them, and I said, "I've spoken about you."

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There you go. How lucky they were a part of that. I'm surprised they weren't watching when we talked about it.

CHLOE READ: Leeton, Lidcombe, Meadowbank, Moss Vale, Newcastle, North Wollongong, Northern Beaches, Orange, Wagga, Shellharbour, Sutherland, Taree, Ultimo and Wetherill Park. There's a mix there across things like fitting and machining, heavy vehicles, electrical, community services, maritime, and ageing and disability.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Shearing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That's very important.

CHLOE READ: Shearing, yes. Conservation and land management. So, yes, a good mix there across really critical skill areas. It was just fantastic to talk to those people who want to be teachers and how excited they are. Some of them were nervous about whether they would be able to do it. All of that kind of promise of becoming a teacher at TAFE. It was really great to meet with them.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy for it to be on notice, but maybe a breakdown of the locations.

Mr STEVE WHAN: For the total numbers?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, just where they all are. It would be interesting to have that.

CHLOE READ: We actually had two cohorts this year. Cohort six was earlier in the year. We could definitely give you both on notice. Again, it's a broad range across the State and a whole range of different things. There's a bit more plumbing in the last one and motorbikes, that sort of thing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you want to add something, Ms Tickle?

JULIE TICKLE: No, that's very comprehensive.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: We had some reports in relation to some job cuts or changes in a couple of TAFE campuses in the regions: Dubbo, Orange and Port Macquarie. Are you aware, Minister, of the impacts on those campuses in terms of positions?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We mentioned before the 100 jobs as part two of the move to the operational model. Those jobs that are being affected there are not campus specific; they can be located anywhere in the State. My understanding from the positions there is that around about 40 per cent of them currently work in regional areas. Potentially around 40 or so of them may end up being in regional areas. But I would also expect that in each of those areas there's a net increase. It's always difficult when anybody's job is impacted by a restructure. That's something which is regrettable.

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But the majority of those jobs are in the product and quality section. What we're doing there is moving a lot of the curriculum development over to fit in with the faculties and have the teachers who are delivering it having more input into the curriculum and development. That's been an important part of the transition in the operating model. Obviously that means that some jobs are negatively affected by that, and that's regrettable. But overall I think it's going to be a real positive for the operation of TAFE. Ms Read can add to that.

CHLOE READ: Just to add two things. One is that none of those jobs are teachers. The second would be that we've only just finished consultation, so we're now working through all that feedback. That number will change because we hear from our staff about places where we maybe haven't understood the flow and impact of a particular change or the volume or whatever. We design it with people, so we would expect that number to change based on feedback.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Increase or decrease, Ms Read?

CHLOE READ: I would be surprised if it increased.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The last count I got was under 100, so I'm still saying 100, just to be safe.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Be transparent, Minister. There's nothing wrong with that.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The other aspect to that is that we have been talking about these changes now for a considerable length of time. My impression is that there's quite a good understanding within TAFE of the reasoning for these changes: why we want to change the structure in this way and how it will help us to better deliver product in the longer term.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Specifically, back to Dubbo, Orange and Port Macquarie, have there been any teaching positions cut from those campuses that you're aware of?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Not that I'm aware of, but I'll ask Ms Tickle if she could answer that.

JULIE TICKLE: No, there's no teaching positions at all proposed to be reduced through these changes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But outside of those 100—because I appreciate they're non-teaching, but I'm just wondering at those three campuses of your teaching—

Mr STEVE WHAN: I sometimes get correspondence from people who say, "I haven't been given my course that I taught last year to teach again." That's usually related to demand. Or it might be that we're trying to better utilise one of those permanent teachers that we've got in. So I wouldn't rule out there are some individuals who might have had their loads change because of those issues. But I'm not aware of any specifics in that case.

CHLOE READ: If you want to give me any information, I'm happy to follow up on it. As the Minister said, because of that change to move so much of our staff base to be permanent staff, that's changed the balance. You might have some casual teachers—as you reference—who are no longer going to be teaching something with us. It's obviously the trade-off of being casual—the less permanent nature of that employment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the overall changes—because I'm assuming those 100 job cuts are part of phase one of your changes in the operating model?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's phase two, actually. We expect to complete this by the end of the year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And that's the consultation that's just started?

CHLOE READ: It's just finished.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that it, or is there a phase three in terms of changes to the operating model or are you hoping that that'll be—

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, there is some further—actually, I won't say that definitively. I'll ask Ms Read and Ms Tickle to comment on that.

CHLOE READ: No, not at the moment.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So there are no more plans for other—

CHLOE READ: There's no phase three, no. This is the bulk of the operating model changes. You'd recall that originally some of the changes we're doing now were going to be in phase one, and we deferred those based on consultations, so this is kind of finalising that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And you would expect that to play its way out throughout the course of this year. Is that what you're hoping to do?

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CHLOE READ: That's right.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, absolutely.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could look at course delivery and the high school level face-to-face courses offered by TAFE, in terms of the student cohort of the face-to-face high school level courses, who usually attends those courses in terms of vulnerabilities and awareness of students that are seeking that level of course delivery?

Mr STEVE WHAN: You mean in terms of the high school equivalent qualifications that TAFE offers on TAFE campuses?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Yes.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will ask Ms Read for a more detailed answer on this. I visit a number of those courses and speak to students, and they're essentially students who don't feel that they can continue at high school and feel that a different learning environment is going to suit them. It is certainly a group that might otherwise disengage from the education system.

CHLOE READ: I might expand on that. As the Minister said, there are a number of students that come to us. You did ask for school age as opposed to school level of education?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: High school level teaching, like the HSC equivalent.

CHLOE READ: There are two things there. There are HSC equivalents. That often can be older students—so they're not school age but they come to us to do the HSC because they may not have completed it when they were at school. Then we have school-age students who might come to us to do that while they're still of school age, including some students who might be in year 10. Then we have students who aren't looking for that kind of high school credential; they're looking for vocational education, like apprenticeships or other things, that would come to us. Then we have some that are shared enrolments with Mr Dizdar and his colleagues in the other sectors who come to TAFE for some of their education but also retain some of their education at schools.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, it has been drawn to my attention that in July 2025 TAFE NSW cancelled the high school level face-to-face courses at Moss Vale TAFE. The circumstances were that three days notice was provided to the students. Some of these students did meet that cohort of being vulnerable in their learning needs. They were advised that they had to travel to campuses in Campbelltown, Wollongong or Goulburn, and others were told to defer their studies. Could you elucidate? How are we managing this when we're cancelling courses?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's not quite right. The fundamental issue here is that we only had six enrolments. I know there was some media reporting of there being 24 enrolments, but there were only six enrolments. That makes it difficult to conduct a face-to-face course. TAFE did work internally and with the students to provide a mixed-delivery course so that they could all continue to have that course delivered—those six students. We have worked very hard in this circumstance to make sure that no-one's missing out and that they continue to get the opportunity to come to this course. It is difficult to deliver a course for only six people. That's always going to be the case. We do our best.

One of the reasons why we're taking TAFE out of the contestable market is so that we can try to be more predictable in the offerings that we have, particularly in regional areas. It's always going to be difficult to deliver a full face-to-face course for that number of students. I'd ask Ms Read to talk about it. We have put in place some really specific arrangements to make sure that these people don't miss out. Ms Read can elaborate on that.

CHLOE READ: Thanks, Minister. As you did mention, we first gave the students options—so online delivery via TAFE Digital but supported at the Moss Vale campus versus going to a different campus, as you mentioned. I understand that the majority of students preferred to stay at the campus but with support for them. They're engaging in our digital delivery but with support on campus. What our people there have done is met with the students and their parents to make sure that they understand what's available to them, including that support, and then there are individual student meetings on their education—so making sure we understand where they're up to in terms of their study and any potential credit transfers—and then developing an individual learning plan for each of those students to make sure that we support them to get that Certificate IV in Tertiary Preparation by the end of 2025.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Read, if I could just redirect that, it was the cancellation of the course at the Moss Vale TAFE. In terms of other locations, students were advised to travel to Campbelltown, Wollongong or Goulburn. These are vulnerable students in terms of how this is being managed.

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CHLOE READ: I understand. I think we offered them the option to remain at Moss Vale—essentially, the course is running from Moss Vale but being delivered by TAFE Digital—or to travel to those campuses. As I said, most of those students have opted to remain at the Moss Vale campus. There is on-campus support as well as that digital delivery for them.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Read, how does this situation reconcile with the TAFE NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan in a situation like this, where we've got vulnerable students and courses are cancelled?

CHLOE READ: I'm not sure that I can comment on the particular students and whether they were students with disability. I think your point is that those students, because of their young age, if nothing else, would need support. That's why we sat and met with their families as well as those students. That's why those individual learning plans are really important—to make sure that we understand how they're progressing. That's why the digital offering being on campus and having on-campus support is also really important. I think we have responded to that sense that that cohort needs additional support.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, are there other campuses where HSC-level face-to-face courses have been changed or cancelled?

Mr STEVE WHAN: When you look at the whole of TAFE delivery and the way that TAFE was set up under the Smart and Skilled system by the last Government, every course at the moment has cut-off points where, if there is not enough enrolment, the course can be cancelled at very short notice. We're actually changing the system and taking TAFE out of the contestable market. It doesn't mean we'll be able to deliver courses face to face for six people, because they still have to be viable. But it does give us more flexibility in the longer term, once we've done this change—a very significant change for TAFE—to, for instance, work with regional communities about the provision of courses and give them predictability that they won't be cancelled at short notice.

It's not just about the tertiary preparation courses or the high school equivalent courses; it's actually a system which is applied right across TAFE because of the contestable market, which was put in place by the previous Government. In saying that, we still have to have viable courses. We'll just do our absolute best to work with anybody who is negatively affected to make sure they have options.

The CHAIR: Last year we noted the University of Wollongong's interim vice-chancellor had sat on KordaMentha's board while the university engaged the firm. Separately, the Western Sydney University chancellor, Jennifer Westacott, began her tenure while still chief executive of the Business Council of Australia and now serves as a special adviser to KPMG. Are you concerned by the level of influence that corporate consultants have on university councils, Minister?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I would be concerned if there were direct conflicts of interest, but I would also expect the councils to have processes in place to ensure that there were not conflicts of interest and that, if there were perceived conflicts, they were being dealt with appropriately. I don't think I would say to universities, "You can't use external consultants", and I don't have the capacity to do that. It's not unreasonable for people to question the use of consultants and the extent to which they're being used. As you know, the Government itself has made a very strong policy position of trying to reduce the use of external consultants. Interestingly, Chair, just let me note that the universities have been very quick to come to the Government and say, "We really like the fact that you're using less consultants and use us instead."

The CHAIR: Just on that, I chaired the inquiry into the Government's overuse of consultants earlier in this parliamentary term. I'm glad that some of those recommendations have been taken up by the Government. One of the things we discovered or made as a finding in relation to conflicts of interest was that there may not be a direct conflict of interest, but when you end up with a number of consultants and big business types on a board there is a normative influence. It makes more sense to then outsource everything and to use consultants for everything. The question is still this: Does it concern you that there are quite a lot of consultants and big business types sitting on university boards?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I don't want to reflect on individuals that are on boards at the moment. But I would say to you that I've made it clear on a number of occasions in our priorities for appointing people to the councils of universities, we've said very clearly that we believe people should have direct educational experience. In that process, I've also asked universities, when they come to me with nominees for the positions, not only to tell me about that person's experience but to show me a matrix of the rest of the board as well to see what the balance is like.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the change to the course delivery of the HSC face to face, I appreciate that the availability can be reliant on the enrolment numbers. Maybe on notice, would we might be

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able to get a list of where the HSC face to face is currently available—at what TAFE campuses in New South Wales?

CHLOE READ: The HSC or the tertiary—

Mr STEVE WHAN: The high school equivalent or tertiary—there are a few different courses in that. We'll take on notice—

CHLOE READ: I understand what you're looking for.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The high school level face to face—yes. Happy to elaborate.

CHLOE READ: Why don't we take that on notice and get you the high school level tertiary preparation-type courses?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Where they are currently available at campuses in New South Wales, reflecting there have been changes.

CHLOE READ: I'd be happy to.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Minister, could you please update the Committee on what the 2025-26 New South Wales budget means for TAFE NSW?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It is a very exciting year. As I did say earlier, we've seen a 23 per cent increase in the TAFE budget over the time that we've been in government. We're seeing record investment in delivering skills for New South Wales. We need to do that because we know that we have some serious skills shortages in New South Wales and around the economy. We hear it talked about all the time. We are seeing an additional \$121 million in 2025-26 to see access to the facilities and industry equipment, following the years of rundown that we saw in TAFE over the decade or so of Coalition Government. We certainly have seen some really exciting work, as I've mentioned before, in ensuring that we have more permanent teachers in our workforce. All that is contributing, I think—and I'm seeing it from when I go around and talk to TAFE—to TAFE feeling more confident about its future. I think that's really important, because it's the cornerstone of vocational training in New South Wales.

It's very important that the TAFE organisation and the teachers and the staff there feel confident that the Government is working with them to make sure that we are able to deliver through the vocational system in New South Wales. I'm really excited about the prospects over the years ahead with the new operating model and with the investment that we're making in facilities but I think, much more importantly, the recurrent investment that we're making in ensuring that we've got the people there to deliver the skills for New South Wales and to recruit the teachers. For way too long, we really saw TAFE being treated as if it was just the same as non-government providers. It was part of the Smart and Skilled contestable system. We, in conjunction with particularly the Teachers Federation and others, have moved to take TAFE out of the contestable market and recognise it as a core of vocational training in New South Wales. That fits with our skills plan and with our TAFE charter, and I think it's something that we can all be very proud of.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Minister, I know you've been doing a lot of work with the Federal Government on fee-free places. I wondered if you could talk a little bit about how those places will help TAFE grow the skilled workforce in the State.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Again, it is terrific to actually be working with a Federal Labor government that is so committed to vocational training and that has signed with us a five-year National Skills Agreement. As part of that, as we saw at the last Federal election, is an allocation of funding for fee-free TAFE. We will be delivering 147,400 fee-free places across the sector. That's something which helps us to target—and we're very deliberately targeting those fee-free places in those skills areas of need in New South Wales. In some of the previous fee-free allocations we've seen a bit of a broad splash go out, which didn't target the high skills need areas. So that is something which we've focused very deliberately on. That includes things like pre-apprenticeship courses in construction, community services and youth work. The biggest area, actually, of take-up of the Commonwealth-funded fee-free places in New South Wales is going into areas that help with things like NDIS and aged care and from State-funded fee-free into things like apprenticeships and traineeships. It's a really important basis for addressing those skills needs that we've identified in the skills plan.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Speaking about the skills needs and where we need to build up skills, construction and housing is what we're all talking about. I wonder if you could expand a bit more on the Government's plan to invest in the skills that we need to tackle the housing crisis.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Again, we're working very closely with the Federal Government on this, and there are a number of aspects to this. It is important to note, I think, that when someone comes in and does an

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apprenticeship, that's an uncapped section. We will teach everybody who wants to come in as an apprentice to construction in New South Wales. We're doing a lot of work to build TAFE's capacity in this, and the programs that we've got to recruit teachers are a part of that, and improvements to facilities and also working with industry and community—I'll come back to this about actually promoting people coming in. We're also looking at areas like recognition of prior learning and working with the Commonwealth to see how we can do that better and how we can help people who want to do mid-career transitions. Pathways are really important too. Just this week, the secretary and I announced that we've made the Educational Pathways Program permanent, which had been going on a year-to-year basis. The Educational Pathways Program is in 183 schools across New South Wales.

MURAT DIZDAR: Correct, 183.

Mr STEVE WHAN: That links students with industry to give them a taste and the opportunity to then come in and do things like school-based apprenticeships. We're seeing some really fantastic results out of that program. We were talking to some of the young people who had come through that program just this week as we announced the funding. The results have been really outstanding in getting kids who aren't from families that have traditionally got trade backgrounds. When you talk to apprentices, it's often dad, mum, an uncle or whoever who has actually got them into it. These sorts of programs are helping us to access families and kids who aren't traditionally coming into trades. That's really important, because we have seen apprentice numbers perhaps not increasing enough to actually meet the demand that we've got out there in the construction sector and for the transition to net zero in New South Wales. We need to be doing a lot more to actually be talking to not only the young people but schools and parents about those opportunities.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Thanks so much, Minister. I appreciate that.

The CHAIR: That brings us to our morning tea break. We will return at 11.15 am.

(Short adjournment)

The CHAIR: Welcome back. We now recommence with questions from the crossbench. Ms Mihailuk.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, earlier you mentioned to me that you're going to include some health courses. Is that to complement the health courses from the Western Sydney University at Bankstown campus?

Mr STEVE WHAN: What we do see are opportunities there in that co-location for pathways—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What health courses is Bankstown university campus going to provide?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The main reason for having health courses in Bankstown is because we're going to have a fantastic new hospital there and we actually want to be working with the hospital specifically on this process.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But my question specifically, Minister—and I respect what you're saying—

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Ms Read to talk about this, but one of the—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Is it to complement the courses that the university will provide in health?

Mr STEVE WHAN: What you do see as a pathway in health often is people going from a vocational course at TAFE and then on to a university course.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes, I accept that. I think you're right. Yes, you're right about that.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We would certainly overall be expecting that we'd be working with the Western Sydney University as with other areas.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Are you suggesting that will happen?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Ms Read to talk about specific relationships with the Western Sydney University.

CHLOE READ: At the moment, the planning for additional delivery at Bankstown, particularly focused on nursing, is really related to our faculty planning across the area to understand why we have particular courses in the health space to make sure—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But I'm asking whether it's there to complement their courses.

CORRECTED

CHLOE READ: Yes, so I'm answering to say most of the planning that we've done is about the way that TAFE thinks about the delivery across the State, the proximity to hospitals and where other offerings are in the health sector for TAFE. We will certainly be working with Western Sydney on what it is that they offer that might offer our students then a pathway beyond study with us to go and study with them.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, when I asked the question to the professor and he responded to my supplementary questions, he advised that there are no health-related subjects at all at the Bankstown CBD campus of the Western Sydney University. There are no health courses.

Mr STEVE WHAN: As I've just said to you, we're setting up our health to work in with the fact that we have an amazing new hospital being built there.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So you'll be talking to the university that perhaps they could undertake some health courses as well so you can have that jump from TAFE to university suggested earlier?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Can I get Ms Read to actually answer that again, but, as I've already said to you, our focus in setting up health in the area is because we want to work closely with the hospital that is being built in the area, a \$2 billion hospital for Bankstown—state of the art. We want to be working with that. What we do know from there is, regardless of where they're offered, that people who undertake our nursing courses, for example, then go on to work and study and get further qualifications. Ms Read can elaborate on the Western Sydney University.

CHLOE READ: The reference to working—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You've given me the answer. Ms Read can come back after lunch. I have very limited time with you, Minister. Thank you, Ms Read. I just wanted to quickly ask you as well, how many car parking spaces are you going to provide at the temporary location, Minister?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask TAFE to be specific about this. There'll be parking spaces in the building for a number of people, for people with disabilities and special needs. One of the reasons why it's so important to have the TAFE in Bankstown near to the new metro line, near to public transport is because the vast majority of the students, particularly those who come from non-English-speaking backgrounds and recent immigrants, are coming by public transport. That's one of the critical reasons—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Is that how you think they currently come to Bankstown TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: —why we need to have it close to a public transport hub.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Sorry, Minister, is there data to confirm what you just said, Minister, that Bankstown TAFE students predominantly use public transport now?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Ms Read to elaborate on this, but we are for some time retaining building D on the hospital site and we do have some parking associated with that, but I'll ask Ms Read to elaborate on this.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Sorry, could you just elaborate on what you just said to me, Minister? You will retain some parking currently on the current site.

Mr STEVE WHAN: In the short term. I'll ask Ms Read to talk about that.

CHLOE READ: Just in the short term because, as part of transition arrangements, we can maintain a presence on the site for a period of time. The other thing that might be of interest, I think, is obviously we have a number of campuses in the area, so we're doing assessment of parking at those campuses—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Ms Read, they're not answering my question. I just wanted to know how many parking spots will be available for students in the new arrangement. You must have that available.

CHLOE READ: There will be the 560 free parks at Lidcombe.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How much?

CHLOE READ: At Lidcombe, there's 560.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: No, I'm asking at Bankstown on the new site.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order—

CHLOE READ: I understand that. What I'm trying to explain—

The CHAIR: Order! I'll hear the point of order.

CORRECTED

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: The procedural fairness resolution suggests that we treat our witnesses with courtesy, and I suggest that Ms Mihailuk may be verging—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I object to your suggestion.

The CHAIR: Order!

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: To the point of order: I object that I'm being discourteous—

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: I haven't finished my point of order, Chair.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: —but I'm trying to ask specifically about Bankstown.

The CHAIR: Order! I will hear the point of order and then I will hear the response.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Use your delay tactics in the afternoon with the professors.

The CHAIR: Order! Dr Kaine.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: I will continue by saying that Ms Read was attempting to answer and, again, Ms Mihailuk was not allowing her to and peppering her with questions. I suggest that is not in accordance with the procedural fairness resolution.

The CHAIR: Did you want to put a response?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm going to finish this particular line of questioning in any event.

The CHAIR: If I could just rule on the point of order, I think we do need to maintain courtesy to the extent possible, but I don't want to delay you any further. Go ahead.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Minister, can I just return you back to the questions that I asked previously about the lease arrangements between the university and Canterbury-Bankstown Council. Are you familiar with any of the terms of the lease arrangement?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No. Essentially, we are going into an arrangement—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can you just answer that as a yes or no, Minister?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We are going into an arrangement with Western Sydney University. Their relationship with the council is not something that I have knowledge of.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I might just brief you a little bit. One of the answers that the professor provided in the supplementary questions—

Mr STEVE WHAN: You will have the opportunity to ask him.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: If you had an opportunity, you could have read them, but you didn't read those answers. That's fine. He said in there that 25 per cent of building—

Mr STEVE WHAN: For a moment, Chair, can I just be clear about this. My responsibility as the Minister responsible for TAFE is TAFE's contract and relationship with the Western Sydney University. It is not Western Sydney University's relationship with the council. Let's not mix those things up.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Okay. I'm putting to you that he said:

Under the terms of the lease, the University pays the Council a peppercorn rent, unless more than 25% of the building is not occupied by the University or used for university purposes.

When I look at the arrangement that you're going to lease 10,500 square metres, of the 33,482 square metres that comes out as a percentage of 31.36 per cent. It now is above the 25 per cent arrangement. Will you flag this as the Minister? You're still a Crown Minister. You should still be concerned generally that an organisation that you've decided to work with is no longer compliant with a particular lease arrangement.

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's a matter entirely between Western Sydney University and the council. We have an agreement with Western Sydney University which is based, as I said, on an assessment of market value. It's not up to us to be—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You're leasing out 31.36 per cent of the university campus.

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's a question for the university or the council. It's not a question for me.

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So you'll play no role in that? You're not concerned even though in the Western Sydney University Act under section 32D and 32C you have the power to be informed about commercial activities?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Our relationship as it applies to TAFE and renting space in the Western Sydney University building is a relationship of a tenant to a landlord. What relationship that landlord then has with other bodies of government, including local councils, has nothing to do with the amount of money that we pay or the services that we're going to deliver in the area. I think it's really important for the people of Bankstown that they get TAFE courses which suit their area which are available in their town centre. That's what we're delivering. We're excited that we're able to expand the number of courses for the local area. Ms Mihailuk, if you'd like to come and talk to me other than just asking questions in estimates, if you'd like to get a briefing from TAFE, I'm very happy to organise that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I just want to make sure that the people of Bankstown get value for money, and part of that is that this is their land, the ratepayers' land, at the Western Sydney University that has been given over as peppercorn rent to the Western Sydney University, and now we hear that the New South Wales taxpayer is going to pay \$25 million across five years to an organisation that currently pays no rent whatsoever. I would have thought you'd be concerned.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It sounds to me like that's a question for you to ask the council.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: It certainly is.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We're the tenant in this situation, speaking as the TAFE Minister.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm just reminding you that you have some power under the Act to also inform yourself and to take some concern about the arrangement.

Mr STEVE WHAN: As I said, I'm very happy for you to ask for a meeting to talk about this or a briefing so that you can go through the whole thing with TAFE.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So you're committing that you won't take a role or any interest whatsoever if you think the university is in breach of an arrangement?

Mr STEVE WHAN: If I understand your point correctly, you're saying that the ratepayers of the council area you don't think are getting full value because now the State Government is coming in and renting.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That was their land. That was council land. It was public land. It has been leased at peppercorn rent to the Western Sydney University on the arrangement that the—

Mr STEVE WHAN: Isn't this an issue for your council?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: —bulk of the site should be used for university purposes. Now we know it's not, because a New South Wales government agency is going to lease an arrangement.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I haven't got anything to add to that. It is an issue for your council, I think, not for TAFE.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Minister, good morning. Will the New South Wales Government rule out supporting Jillian Segal's report's recommendation for government funding to be withheld from universities, programs or individuals within universities?

Mr STEVE WHAN: My portfolio doesn't actually provide funding to universities directly at this stage. So I don't actually have any funding to be subject to that report. That report is one that needs to be considered by the Federal Government as the primary funding agency for that. I would expect them to respond to it.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Will you advocate against any withholding of any funding from New South Wales universities if those recommendations are supported or made?

Mr STEVE WHAN: In terms of Federal funding? There is on occasions—I know that the State Government has previously provided things like capital funding for various projects with universities. But currently, from my portfolio, there isn't any. It is something which, I think, the Federal Government would need to respond to. I've certainly read aspects of the report—maybe ask Mr Kurucz.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I can come back to Mr Kurucz in the break. Do you agree with those findings and recommendations?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm not going to give a personal view on those. It's not something that we've considered at a policy level at this stage.

CORRECTED

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Will you advocate against any withholding any funding from New South Wales universities for disagreeing with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The universities across Australia have developed a definition of antisemitism, which, I think, is a balanced definition of antisemitism. I'd be expecting them to be, in their activities, complying with that. It makes a number of things very clear, I think, very reasonably, that we don't tolerate antisemitism, but it also makes it clear that criticism of the Israeli Government is not antisemitic in itself, and I'd agree with the definition that the universities have put in place.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you agree that the IHRA's definition conflates anti-Zionism with antisemitism?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's not something that I have a position on at the moment, as Minister.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Has the New South Wales Government got any position on this? Is there any consideration of forming a position on this? I'm not asking for your personal opinion.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's a reasonable question. It's not something that has come to me to consider at the moment. It's not something that's been raised with me as being likely to be considered at the education Ministers' meeting coming up. If it is, then I would, obviously, be getting advice on that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: You're aware, though, that the Federal Court judgement has found that a university's adoption of that definition contravenes—

Mr STEVE WHAN: The definition that you mentioned rather than the definition that they—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Yes.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm not aware of the specifics of that case. I am not sure if Mr Kurucz can add to that.

JEREMY KURUCZ: No.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Jillian Segal in her report claimed:

We are on a dangerous trajectory where young people raised on a diet of disinformation and misinformation about Jews today risk becoming fully-fledged antisemites tomorrow.

Can you point to any examples of this sort of disinformation that she's talking about, in relation to the universities that you are responsible for?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No. Obviously, we'd all be concerned about the role that social media has in misinformation and disinformation. But I am not aware of what that report is referring to specifically. No.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Are you aware of any examples in universities that you are responsible for?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Of things specifically being referred to in that report? No, I am not. Obviously, the issue is around people's right to feel safe on a campus, as something which has been subject of quite a lot of discussion. But, with regard specifically to the report, I am not aware of examples that that might be referring to.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Is it your intention to protect the rights of students and staff at the universities for which you're responsible, to be able to express their freedom of political communication, including their criticism of the genocide that is taking place, Israel's genocide that is taking place in Gaza?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Can I be clear that I don't control what happens on university campuses. That's not a role that I have as a State Minister. To the extent that public land in New South Wales—the Government has taken a very strong position on action to try and stop hate speech and to ensure that people who engage in hate speech have consequences for that. That applies to university lands as well. University lands aren't enclosed lands like a school playground, so it is a different status. The New South Wales Government's strong stance that it's taken on antisemitism, on Islamophobia, on hate speech is something that applies equally across all parts of New South Wales. So, in many senses, any public actions around that rests more with other portfolios. Is there anything that the secretary or Mr Kurucz can add on that?

MURAT DIZDAR: If you are interested in what we've done on the school side, we can unpack that for you.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: No, I am more concerned at this point with the threat of reports like Jillian Segal's and the chilling effect that that may be having on students, staff of universities in New South Wales right now. Largely, I am more interested in what you, as Minister, are inclined to do to continue to protect the rights of free speech, including criticism of Israel and Israel's genocide in Gaza of the Palestinian people.

CORRECTED

Mr STEVE WHAN: My position would be the same as the position the Premier has put and the Government has put, about the right to free speech but also the right to undertake that without engaging in any sort of hate speech or—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: With respect, Minister, the Premier's views on this matter have been under the scope, and people are very critical of those views. This is why I am asking you, in particular, because there are people who don't necessarily trust the Premier right now, particularly given, on 6 May, he received a letter stating very clearly—in a frame—that he is a good friend of Israel and so is the New South Wales Government. So I'm asking you particularly and specifically on behalf of those students right now who are feeling genuinely concerned about the impacts that reports like the Segal report and other sentiments—their freedom of political communication about a matter that is so significant right now. They want to know that it is being protected, particularly by you as the Minister.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have to go back to the role that I actually have in this. Universities are administratively autonomous; I don't direct them in this area. Obviously, we support national efforts to tackle racism, including antisemitism, so that staff and students are safe on university campuses, and it's absolutely essential that we are doing whatever we can to ensure that people do have the right to express themselves freely but do so without it being either antisemitic or Islamophobic or engaging in hate speech. I come back to again—hate speech, unlawful speech, destructive, violent behaviour is something that we deal with in New South Wales through the New South Wales police, when it's on campus or off campus, in any part of New South Wales. It's not a different situation.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Do you recognise that, at the moment, some of the laws that this Parliament has provided the police are currently challenged in the courts for their constitutionality, that we aren't necessarily on solid ground and that there is potential for—

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's not up to me to speculate on what courts might decide. I'm a member of the Government and Cabinet in New South Wales, and I support the positions that the Government is taking.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Would you consider at all issuing some kind of ministerial directive to ensure that—

Mr STEVE WHAN: I have no power that allows me to issue a directive. There is no power that I have, as Minister in this situation, that gives me the power to direct institutions.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: You are free to write to all universities, expressing a view that the freedom of political communication is live, well and protected by you as the Minister and the New South Wales Minns Labor Government.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'm free to write to institutions; I'm not able to give directives.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Okay: Write to them.

Mr STEVE WHAN: As I've said to you, we have a strong position in New South Wales around hate speech, regardless of on campus or off campus, or the property it is on, and that needs to be dealt with through the appropriate channels.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, if I could refer you to *Budget Paper No. 03*, which was referred to earlier. At 4-32, under "TAFE Commission", "Major Works" and "New Works", the second line under "New Works" is "TAFE NSW Bankstown Campus Relocation", which is \$100 million. Minister, in recognition of the population growth in the south-west of Sydney, what has been allocated in terms of new works to the Miller campus in the city of Liverpool, or the Liverpool campus itself in Liverpool?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Obviously that \$100 million is a specific line item. We've got quite a long list of campuses that are getting upgrades or where maintenance work is being undertaken. We can delve into that a little bit more. There has been quite a bit of discussion around Liverpool, is my understanding, but I might ask Ms Read to—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The reference was to new money, "New Works" in this budget. I see Bankstown listed.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Like I said, obviously within line items in the budget there's quite a long list of capital works that are going on in campuses across New South Wales, building on what we did last year and the budget before. Perhaps Ms Read could elaborate on that.

CORRECTED

CHLOE READ: I think I'll need to take on notice the specifics, and I think we already took on notice to come back with the list of campuses and works that we would be planning to do on them. For those specific campuses of Miller and Liverpool, I'm happy to come back on notice on that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the city of Campbelltown campus, either Macquarie Fields or Campbelltown itself, do we know anything there? New money, "New Works"—there's big population growth.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, there is.

CHLOE READ: Yes. We certainly have an expansion of electrotechnology at Campbelltown as one of the projects on the cards, but I think it would be better for me to come back with all of those together.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Would it be anything at the level of new money for Bankstown? I appreciate the circumstances there.

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, because the Bankstown one is, as I say, the circumstances of relocating the whole TAFE. That is a substantial investment being undertaken there.

CHLOE READ: I might also say that, just on those campuses particularly, they are big campuses. They have strong enrolments, as you've called out, and obviously they are areas of population growth. They are also campuses where we do have often underutilised space, so that's one of the reasons for the Padstow campus move as part of the Bankstown relocation. We may not need that kind of significant building-level investment in those campuses to be able to more fully utilise them. We might need smaller investments to make sure there's wi-fi, to make sure facilities are upgraded and to make sure there's additional access to particular types of facilities. I'm really happy to come back on those on notice.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, at our earlier estimates session with your education colleague, we were looking at school infrastructure specific to the growth of the housing targets. We were examining areas such as the Hills, where we've got 50 demountable classrooms at the local high school and we've got a huge influx of new residents and new units. The issue was, in terms of identifying future campus sites for new schools, meeting the educational needs for this booming population. What's in place for TAFE and training in terms of the south-west?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Just on schools, yes, we recognise that there is a huge backlog of areas. I think on the site you mentioned, there were 42 demountables left there by the previous Government. There's a range of building projects underway in the education sector, including—I'm really excited to say—three kicking off next week in Monaro, which is another high-growth area, so it's a very exciting time in that space. We've got 154 TAFE campuses, so we believe we are able to cope with the growth in demand and the growth in population in the regions by better utilising our existing campuses. That's our focus at the moment. We don't have any areas where, at this stage, we are seeing justification. One of the things we are doing is working closely with Education on better relationship sharing, when that's possible—so making sure that we are integrating vocational education into some of those schools and, where possible, looking at shared facilities. Perhaps just on those growth areas, I'll ask Ms Read to elaborate.

CHLOE READ: To the south-west Sydney focus of the question, I think it's important to know that we are part of some of those planning activities with those councils. With the Campbelltown Health and Education Precinct, we worked really closely not only with the council but with the universities and others on planning for the region and understanding what it is that we can offer or already do offer that might be of use. Obviously we've also got, in terms of the centres of excellence, the Wetherill Park manufacturing centre of excellence and we've also got the IAT at Kingswood, which is focused on construction. They are some significant pieces of work in those critical skills areas that are specific to that region. I think that's probably—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I think this afternoon we would be happy to cover that a bit more in detail.

CHLOE READ: Yes, sure.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of meeting the training needs of the south-west and the booming population, we know in the schools in booming areas there is modelling, there are projections, and people are looking for the next plan. In terms of training and TAFE, no new campuses are identified. Do we think the existing infrastructure will meet this need?

Mr STEVE WHAN: At the existing campuses, we are certainly continuing to enhance infrastructure when it's needed. We are working very closely across Western Sydney to enhance the demand. We actually want to drive the demand into our courses, and that's probably one of our key challenges. Some of the work that we are doing in Western Sydney, for example, is working closely with Western Sydney airport and the future users of

CORRECTED

the airport there. We are linking high school students into careers there. We are working with TAFE. We are delivering TAFE in schools, including through a range of facilities across Western Sydney. There is a lot of work going on which is about driving the demand. We would love to be seeing our TAFEs bursting at the seams with students, and we will cater for them if they come.

CHLOE READ: Just two other things, if I can: One is obviously—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm just conscious of time, Minister.

CHLOE READ: I'll be super brief. Just specifically on campuses, we have this process of campus master planning that lets us look across the region and make sure we've got the right offerings, and then we've got that faculty planning process, which the Minister mentioned earlier, to really think about particular industries on a statewide scale. That's really important for us there.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, in terms of the "New Works" new money allocation of \$100 million for the TAFE NSW Bankstown campus relocation, why has it taken two years for the Opposition to prosecute this case for Bankstown TAFE? Where's the money to relocate the temporary facility and the reinstatement to keep Bankstown TAFE viable and available for students? It has taken two years of us sitting here. I've made countless speeches in the House on this. Up until now it was, "No money's required. Health is looking after this." Now we see a budget line here of \$100 million. Why has it taken two years, Minister?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's not really a good characterisation of it, but let's go through the history of this. The former Government announced that they were going to build a Bankstown hospital. They didn't have a site which was suitable. They allocated a funding allocation which turned out to be around \$700 million too little. So what this Government has come in and done is, once again, take an announcement that the Coalition made—with no basis, with no proper planning—and turn it into a reality. We've now got an allocation that's over \$2 billion for the hospital project.

Out of that same allocation comes the \$100 million that's coming to TAFE. As I said to the Committee previously, it was all being considered as part of the same process in the Government's budget consideration. That's why last time I spoke about this at estimates, we did not know the final cost of the hospital. It had gone well over \$2 billion. They are going to get a fantastic hospital in Bankstown, and also a great TAFE. Once again, it's this Government which has taken a poorly considered announcement from the previous Coalition Government and turned it into something which is going to be a huge benefit for the Bankstown region.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, in this room over these estimates sessions you have told me on many occasions that there was no need for the relocation money and that it's all up to Health and it's all coming from Health.

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, I didn't say that at all.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I could quote you on this.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Well, you're misquoting, because what I said to you—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: We're pleased to see the money; we just want a few more details about the money.

Mr STEVE WHAN: You're misquoting, because what I said to you was that the funding was being considered as a part of the process of Health making the proposal to government for an allocation to build the hospital and, as part of the hospital project, to relocate TAFE. Given that that wasn't finalised the last time I was before estimates, I wasn't able to tell you that the cost would be \$100 million.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, in terms of the relocation plan, we spoke earlier about early childhood education being relocated to Padstow. I note that there's some significant infrastructure in place at the current Bankstown campus for that facility, including children's toilets and playground facilities. Do we have a costing on what the relocation of that infrastructure is, in terms of the \$100 million?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. As I mentioned earlier in the session today, the allocation for the relocation of three areas of courses to Padstow TAFE is approximately \$30 million of the \$100 million that's been allocated. That will include the childhood facilities. The fact that the Padstow TAFE is a ground-level facility makes it really very suitable for this because you can have outdoor play areas, which the existing Bankstown campus didn't have. I also point out that we also have a childcare centre on the site at Bankstown. That's not relocating to Padstow. That will stay in the Bankstown CBD area.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, I also note that on the New South Wales Government's website there are lots of big colourful photos of yourself, many Ministers and Government members, big colourful posters,

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plans and lots of energy. The new hospital—the dream, the vision. The one thing the Bankstown TAFE currently offers is the hairdressing course. Students are asking me—I've been there myself and I've visited them; it's an outstanding course—what happens to the hairdressing course at Bankstown TAFE?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That will continue. It will go into the Western Sydney University tower. There's a transition. We're keeping, as I said, building D for a while, but the Bankstown tower is being fitted out to deliver hairdressing and beauty.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I note that students are starting to question what's going to be relocated and what this means for their study. There's no mention of the hairdressing services.

Mr STEVE WHAN: That's interesting—and I'll ask Ms Read to elaborate on this—because we've gone through a very extensive process of information and consultation with staff and students. We've had staff able to see the new facilities. We've been talking to students about where their courses will be delivered. Ms Read might want to elaborate on that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: It's the absence of the listing of that course. Ms Read, if you want to look into that, you can. Ask the questions.

CHLOE READ: I'm very happy to. The other thing is—not just for this campus but because it's our natural cycle—we haven't yet put out course offerings for next year. That happens relatively soon, in fact. That will make things clearer for students as well. But we're certainly communicating directly with students who we know are continuing into 2026 with us to make sure they understand the move, where they will be going and if they're needing assistance, where they can go to. Then, as the Minister said, there will be a staff town hall and a subsequent email to give them updates. There's a website with some FAQs on, I think. They were also able to tour the new space at Western Sydney University in the middle of June, and there will be another all-staff in September. I think we sent some update comms out today, by coincidence, that refers to that session in September. So hopefully people are really well informed.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, is it still the plan to reinstate the Bankstown TAFE to the new combined hospital and TAFE site in Bankstown?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The final decision on the permanent—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: There was a lot of talk early on about this and what this would mean.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, there was. I acknowledge that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Is that still the plan?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The final decision on the long-term location has not been made at this stage.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: So at this point the combined hospital and TAFE site in Bankstown no longer exists.

Mr STEVE WHAN: At this point there hasn't been a final decision made on the ultimate permanent location of TAFE in Bankstown, but there will be a TAFE in the Bankstown CBD.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, is it fair to the community, to the TAFE, to the students and to the health precinct that this was part of the plan—the combined TAFE hospital site? "TAFE, give your site to the hospital but we're going to reinstate you."

Mr STEVE WHAN: The key thing here is that we continue to guarantee the Bankstown community that there will be a TAFE in the Bankstown CBD. We'll be continuing to offer that continuity of courses, regardless of its ultimate final location.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But, Minister, what changed in terms of the plan? The combined TAFE hospital no longer stands.

Mr STEVE WHAN: At the time we were originally talking about this, the costing for the hospital was substantially less than it has ended up needing to be. That's obviously influenced the final make-up of the plans. As I said, we'll establish the TAFE in the tower. We'll have terrific, state-of-the-art facilities there and we'll be offering more courses with the introduction of health courses. The important thing for the people of Bankstown and the region is the fact that they are going to be able to access vocational training in their town centre.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, can you rule out to current and aspiring TAFE students that there won't be another move of Bankstown TAFE? We've got interim arrangements now. We now know it's no longer part of the combined hospital site.

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Mr STEVE WHAN: As I've said to you, there hasn't been a final decision made on the permanent location for the TAFE beyond the five-year agreement we have with Western Sydney University. That's all I can say about it at the moment.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Back on TAFE campuses, if I could look at the Northern Beaches TAFE campus and some of the changes that are taking place there. Minister, do we know what percentage of the buildings at that campus are being used, in terms of occupancy and utilisation?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Firstly, can I say that I was due to visit the Northern Beaches TAFE campus a week or so ago, but, unfortunately, the local member was ill and wasn't able to come, so I postponed that. I am looking forward to visiting the Northern Beaches TAFE campus and hearing from staff there. I'll have to ask about percentage. I haven't been to the campus yet, so I haven't seen what the utilisation is myself. But I'll ask Ms Read to talk about the utilisation of current campus buildings.

CHLOE READ: I don't have that information with me today, so I'll take it on notice specifically for that campus. I would say that it's often difficult for us to give a utilisation figure because it obviously depends on the profile of students. You can do many of our courses online or in person, so those utilisation figures aren't something that we have broadly. But we might have specific information, and I'm really happy to take that on notice and come back to you if we do.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Read, in response to your point there about online course deliveries changing, a lot of students and their families, when they are on campus, are seeing vacant, unoccupied campuses. The question then comes to value for money.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's an interesting point, because I get that feedback as well from campuses around the State. Often the profile of who is there at what times has changed over the years with some of the different delivery methods. Often when I interrogate and I say, "What's this being used for?", there are users of all these spaces, it's just that people may not be there at a time when everyone is there. I use my local campus at Queanbeyan as an example. I used to drive by and say, "Why is no-one in the car park?" I've then been in every building and seen that they are being very actively used, but probably not at the times when everybody sees it at once.

CHLOE READ: The other thing I'd say is that campus master planning process is giving us an opportunity to make sure that we're thinking carefully about that and we're thinking carefully about where we might have other opportunities on those sites. For example, I was at Macquarie Fields the other day. We've now got a suburban study hub in that location. We've got our normal delivery and then there are things like a Service NSW centre on that campus. So there are ways for TAFE to think about this differently into the future, but we want to make sure that we really understand the needs of students first. When we did a lot of face-to-face delivery—Monday to Friday, nine to five—we had a lot of feedback that people need different delivery mechanisms to be able to access that, particularly if they're already in the workforce.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I think at an earlier estimates session, Minister, we had the discussion about whether the RTOs were wanting to utilise these facilities. I just put to you, if they're unoccupied, if they're vacant, does it not make sense to bring another training provider in to utilise this?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, and one of the outcomes in the longer term of moving TAFE out of the contestable market is they will be able to develop some policies which enable that better use of facilities and, potentially, some sharing of facilities without undercutting. In a competitive market, it's not surprising that you might see some resistance to that sort of utilisation that you're talking about. TAFE as the core of the system and government as the steward of the system—in the longer term we would want to see full utilisation of our facilities to the extent it's possible.

The CHAIR: Minister, I understand it's been reported that TAFE NSW is proposing to cut 100 non-teaching jobs across the State. Why has that been thought needed?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We've gone through an operating model change. We're in the second stage of the operating model change. The jobs that are being talked about at the moment are from a couple of divisions of TAFE. The biggest one of those is the Product and Quality section. We've been talking to TAFE staff about this for quite some time, about the structure. Moving to the faculty-based model gives us the opportunity to engage the faculties themselves more directly in the development of the curriculum and also then engage the teachers with the direct industry experience and so on. As part of that change, we are seeing some of the responsibilities move. We've had a net increase in staff in TAFE, with quite substantial net increase in staff in TAFE. But as part of any restructure and moving to the faculty model, you're unfortunately going to have some people whose jobs are negatively affected in that process.

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The CHAIR: Can I clarify for those of us who don't speak TAFE roles as fluently? When you're talking about the ones that are being cut—I understand that some of those are basically people who are currently full time doing curriculum development—if that function is being brought under a faculty model, will you still have these full-time curriculum developers sitting within faculties?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Ms Read and Ms Tickle to elaborate on this but, yes. We're moving to the new curriculum model because there's a really strong recognition—nationally, really—that we need to be able to develop curriculum more quickly, with less complexity and be able to respond more quickly to changing needs in industry. The model that we're developing will certainly bring that expertise to bear on that. For the specifics, I'll ask Ms Read or Ms Tickle to elaborate.

CHLOE READ: Thanks, and I might ask Ms Tickle to elaborate further if she feels I miss something. The idea is that—we're going back a few years now but we did have a period where we outsourced a fair bit of that curriculum development externally. What we're looking to do is move to a model where there is curriculum expertise sitting next to the faculties. What you do is you draw people in to help develop that training package, and curriculum and assessment materials as you need to. So you work with teachers across the State in that model to do it as you need to do it—noting that all the training packages are on a different cycle of renewal and at different times you need different things. Similarly, the TAFE Digital area, which is the other area mostly involved in this change, has run largely quite separately from the faculties. So making sure that the digital delivery is aligned with the faculty model rather than sitting separately is something that's really important to us.

The CHAIR: Just to clarify, does that mean that teachers are taking on an additional burden of curriculum development in addition to what they're currently doing, or not?

CHLOE READ: I think what we're going to look to do is work with teachers who are already experts in this to leverage the work that they do already and to have them work with us on the development of some of the materials. We've had feedback from teachers that some of the materials that we've given to them haven't been exactly right for our students. Assessment would be a really good one where I've had feedback directly that our assessments are complicated—so working with teachers on that. What we can't do is just say, "Hey, could you do this as an extra burden on your workload?" We'll be looking to work through a program at how we reduce administrative burden for teachers so we're not doing that development twice.

The CHAIR: That would be quite reassuring. From what I've heard, people are a bit concerned that they're going to end up with curriculum development in addition to their current jobs. But from what you're saying, that's not the case.

CHLOE READ: Yes. I'd say that there are processes and pieces of our systems and pieces of our architecture that mean we have teachers who now spend a fair bit of time doing things that are not really in the teaching world. The teachers I talk to very much see program design, curriculum design, assessment and the way they tailor that to the set of students in front of them is like their core; it's like the ethos of teaching for them. But as you say, we can't expect teachers to be doing that on top of administrative work that isn't valuable for them.

The CHAIR: To be crystal clear, if a teacher is asked to do some sort of curriculum development, they will be released from some other duty to free them up for that?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We won't be overburdening teachers, no. It's important to note, one of the fundamental benefits of moving out of the contestable market is also the removal of a lot of administrative load on teachers. We're actively working to reduce the administrative workload. The change to bringing so many more teachers almost permanent also means that they have the 15 hours of non-teaching time, which they previously didn't have. So we're doing quite a lot of work to ensure that the administrative load is not overburdening—in fact, we're reducing.

CHLOE READ: Ms Tickle might add something as well.

The CHAIR: One moment. Again, I just want to be quite clear. From a teacher's perspective, if they're sitting there and they go "We're under this huge administrative burden; we have these non-teaching roles within the system to relieve us of that burden", if you're cutting non-teaching roles, how does that not then impact on the administrative load that a teacher has?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Obviously Ms Tickle can elaborate on this, but there'll be a change in the way that some of their time is used but not just adding to it. The key thing about it is—and I've heard the same thing quite consistently around the burden of the assessment and a range of other areas, which really just need to come closer to those who are actually delivering the courses, so that we can actually be more relevant in that area. Ms Tickle?

JULIE TICKLE: Our teachers under the enterprise agreement always have had a role to play in the development and validation of assessments and learning materials. That's always been there. As Ms Read and the

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Minister have said, the additional hours that are available will support them to do that. How that will work is a combination of things. It depends on the complexity of the development required. If it's a really complex unit of competency, for example, that needs quite a lot of development, it's likely that the teacher would be released. Our teachers do 720 hours of teaching per year. What that might mean is they may get released for, say, 50 hours across a semester to contribute to that. At other times when development is not as complex or it's more around quality assurance or if they're an SME, for example, in a niche industry area, that will be under related duties. So it's a combination of the two, depending on the complexity of the delivery. To be clear, related duties is outlined in the enterprise agreement, and the support for curriculum development/assessment design has always been in there.

The CHAIR: We might come back to that this afternoon. Minister, are you able to tell me how much your Government has increased recurrent funding to electrical training specifically, not just TAFE generally?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'd have to take that on notice. Obviously most of the people who come into electrical training are doing apprenticeships and it's an uncapped amount, so we essentially fund everybody who comes in as an apprentice to electrical training. We'd like more. There's been some recent incorrect reports around availability of electrical training, particularly in this semester. There were 25 TAFE campuses offering enrolments in electrotechnology for second semester this year which some media reports just had wrong. We don't have waiting lists in the area. As I say, our restrictions are often about the number of teachers that we have. That's why we've been actively working in that area to increase the number of teachers. I'll ask Ms Read to elaborate on that.

CHLOE READ: What we could do, if you're looking for specific budget increase pieces, would be to give you information on where we've upgraded facilities, where we've trained teachers through Paid to Learn or other mechanisms, and then the department would be able to say the funding that's come through either apprenticeships and traineeships or other qualifications, specifically for things in that industry area. We'd have to piece it together for you.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Just a little bit more information on this: As at 4 August we had 74 offerings available on—

CHLOE READ: Twenty-five campuses.

Mr STEVE WHAN: On 25 campuses, and there was only one that was actually full, so there is capacity there. We would like to see more.

The CHAIR: This may be what you are going to correct me on. My understanding is there were five campuses that were unable to take a single apprentice electrician in 2025. Are you saying that's not correct?

Mr STEVE WHAN: The media report was talking about second semester 2025. But we had 25 locations where the course was being offered and had places across the State. Can you talk to the specific of that question?

CHLOE READ: I'm only aware one of those offerings at Wyong was full at the time. But if you have a list of locations, we can get more information or something like that. The other thing I'd say is that when someone comes to us for an apprenticeship, if there isn't an option available at their nearby TAFE—for example, it might not be offered there, but it is at one down the road, whatever it is—we work specifically with them to find them that offering as soon as we can. We actively manage that to make sure that, wherever possible, we don't want to be turning away any apprentice.

The CHAIR: Can you tell me how many TAFEs in each of the renewable energy zones currently have renewable energy units in scope for electrical apprenticeships?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We might—

CHLOE READ: Take that on notice.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I can tell you some of the TAFEs that have electrotechnology itself. One of the things we are doing out of the centres of excellence—and particularly the one in the Hunter—is to ensure that we are offering courses which are not just apprenticeships in that area but also microskills and short qualifications for people to upskill. They're being offered not just on that campus location but with a number of mobile options as well around the State. We have also been working across portfolios on workforce planning for the renewable energy zones. It's obviously something that really hadn't had a lot of work done in it. But we've been working actively with Minister Sharpe's portfolio and other relevant portfolios in doing workforce planning to try to make sure that we are, in our regional planning models, attempting to address that area.

There's a few challenges in the REZs, which I think are acknowledged across quite a few of the workforce studies. There's one that came out yesterday from the jobs and skills council talking about the challenge of finding the employees in the area. It had some numbers which are fairly daunting in terms of the numbers of apprentices

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that we need to see coming through. It also talked about some of the challenges with, for instance, projects which don't run for the full period of an apprenticeship, and how you overcome those. I've talked a fair bit in the past about whether there's a bigger role for group training organisations in that space. The jobs and skills council also echoed that. There are certainly challenges in the space and really strong challenges in trying to encourage a process where we get apprentices who live in those communities and stay in those communities so that the communities see the benefit. That is one of the things about trying to make sure that communities in country areas see the benefit of the REZs—is getting those long-term jobs.

The CHAIR: I have two specific questions off the back of that. The first one is: How many TAFE campuses currently offer a cert IV in electrical renewable energy? My understanding is there aren't any.

Mr STEVE WHAN: My figures that I've got here are for cert III in electrotechnology. I'll have to pass over to TAFE and perhaps take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Are there any cert IVs?

CHLOE READ: I'm going to need to take it on notice.

The CHAIR: Looking at the website, it looked like there weren't any, so if you could come back on that—even this afternoon—that would be good. The other one is: I understand that some of the cert IIIs in electrotechnology enrolments have been suspended at some of the campuses. Are there any campuses that have suspended that cert III?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Do you mean in terms of availability of enrolments?

The CHAIR: Yes, that they're just not offering it.

Mr STEVE WHAN: As I said, 25 locations where the course is being offered—there was only one which was full. The only areas where they wouldn't be running, where they may have had courses previously where they wouldn't be, is if demand was too low. I have had reports that there's some areas where there wasn't demand for the course, so it didn't happen. But perhaps Ms Read can—

CHLOE READ: Again, what we would do in that case is, if we have a couple of people coming who really want to do it, we would be looking to find them an alternate enrolment, either at a nearby campus or through some other mechanism of delivery. We can do things—for example, in some of the trades where you do the theory part at your local campus and then you do block release where you come and do the more practical things in a campus that's maybe further away to make that practical for you to do that on a weekly basis. As I said, if you want to give me the locations, I'm very happy to go away and investigate that further.

Mr STEVE WHAN: If I can briefly mention, again, coming back to taking TAFE out of the contestable market, one of the reasons that we want to do that is so that we can work with communities around regional New South Wales and say, "Well, you may not have enough to run a course every year," but if we guarantee that a course will run every second or third year, we work with industry to get them working with us to actually supply the numbers that we need to run it in that area. So we're just looking for that bit more flexibility to work with local communities about planning for future needs and not have these hard and fast rules that unless you've got 16 or 12 or whatever, you can't go ahead.

The CHAIR: Ms Read, I understand what was being reported was that the cert III in electrotechnology was unavailable, or full, at Meadowbank, Miller, the Northern Beaches, Ultimo and Kogarah.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I can tell that it was available and taking applications at Miller and—

The CHAIR: Are they full, though? Were they unable to accept them?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No. Ultimo, Meadowbank, Miller, Northern Beaches and St George were all taking enrolments in second semester.

The CHAIR: Were they then able to commence immediately with their training?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes, they came in at second semester and started the second semester. It depends where they're at in their—I've certainly heard from the ETU, who've talked to me about being concerned about delays, but from TAFE's point of view, you've obviously got to start either first or second semester—you can't start in the middle—but the availability has been there.

The CHAIR: Do you keep a record of that in terms of apprentices who are on the job but haven't done any training?

Mr STEVE WHAN: That would probably be a question for Mr Kurucz to answer, because TAFE is obviously not the only deliverer of the apprenticeships in New South Wales either.

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JEREMY KURUCZ: I don't have any specific information with me at the moment. Ms Lawrence might want to add to it.

AMANDA LAWRENCE: We might be able to find that information for you and take it on notice.

The CHAIR: That would be good—if you could come back this afternoon, if at all possible. I'm interested in what percentage of electrical apprentices have to wait six months or 12 months or longer due to capacity constraints. That's what I'm trying to get a handle on. You mentioned the ETU, Minister. Their survey found that 13 per cent of all apprentices have received an electrical shock during their apprenticeship, doubling to 25 per cent if they're behind on their training. They do have real concerns that there's a number of these apprentices on the job that haven't begun their training.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'd be concerned as well. The information I have is that we've had the starting times available and that we don't have waiting lists in electrotechnology at the moment.

The CHAIR: Maybe bring back some more information this afternoon if you have it.

CHLOE READ: Yes, we'll go and have a look at those campuses and take it on notice.

The CHAIR: How many qualified electrical trade teachers does TAFE currently employ?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Ms Read to answer that or take it on notice.

CHLOE READ: We'll take that on notice too.

The CHAIR: If you can provide a comparison of how many there are now compared to, say, five or 10 years ago, some sort of analysis, that would be great.

CHLOE READ: Intuitively, I feel that five years ago, yes; and 10 years ago, I'll come back to you on whether we have that information.

The CHAIR: Fair enough.

CHLOE READ: I would just say, the Paid to Learn piece we were talking about earlier, a third of the cohort are electrical teachers, so nine of 27, I think.

JULIE TICKLE: Correct.

The CHAIR: The decision to cut the 100 non-teaching staff that we were talking about before, will that have any impact specifically on this electrical training?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No.

CHLOE READ: The 100 roles is a number from the beginning of consultation. I just want to flag that we're working through consultation feedback now, so that number will change. I want to make sure that's clear as we use the number as a shorthand. That is the number pre-consultation. We obviously need to respond to feedback from staff on how the functions fit together and how things work.

The CHAIR: In the time I've got left, according to answers given in supplementary questions in March 2025, as at the end of last year TAFE had 22 open, ongoing investigations into allegations of serious wrongdoing or serious misconduct. Can you let me know how many are currently open and what the threshold is for serious wrongdoing or serious misconduct?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll ask Ms Read or Ms Tickle to answer that one.

JULIE TICKLE: In the financial year just gone, we had 100 new matters involving serious wrongdoing or misconduct, with 21 of those still ongoing. I would need to take on notice the specific question you asked, which I think is the comparison for the age ones—the 22 versus now.

The CHAIR: Sorry, the other bit of my question was what is defined as serious wrongdoing or serious misconduct?

JULIE TICKLE: I'll take that on notice for accuracy. As you would know, it's a really complex space. There are a lot of factors that go into each of the matters. I'll take it on notice and provide a definition.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I want to go back to the Moss Vale TAFE high school equivalents that my colleague Ms Merton was asking about earlier in relation to whether or not teaching hours at Goulburn TAFE were modified or changed in any way to allow for the delivery of that blended model that you spoke about.

CHLOE READ: I will take that on notice. As I said earlier, the students opted for online delivery via TAFE Digital and then support on campus, but I need to work out whether that has specifics on Goulburn—

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, what was the consultation with the students, the families and the teaching staff prior to that decision?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think Ms Read outlined earlier some of the work that we were doing with individuals. There was certainly a bit of misinformation around when I first heard about this, and there were figures quoted at 24 students being affected, when the information I had was that only six were enrolled. We've worked with those six and their families. I'll ask Ms Read to elaborate on that. She went into some detail before about the work we'd done with them.

CHLOE READ: As I understand it, we notified them that we wouldn't be able to deliver that qualification face to face at Moss Vale, and then we gave them two options: One was face-to-face delivery elsewhere; the other was online delivery via TAFE Digital. TAFE staff met with the students and their parents to discuss those solutions. The majority of students, as I said, preferred that TAFE Digital with on-campus support rather than travelling somewhere else. There was then a subsequent meeting that's individual with each student to think about where are they at in terms of progress or any potential credit transfers and to develop an individual learning plan for each of them that is designed to support them towards completing their Certificate IV in Tertiary Preparation by the end of 2025 at Moss Vale, delivered online with extra support on campus.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You mentioned Queanbeyan before, Minister, in terms of the courses that are being offered. You said that sometimes it looks quite empty, but you're assuring the Committee that the campus is being utilised.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It's being used.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My understanding is that there are seven courses on offer on campus. Are you able to tell me if that's correct?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll get a clarification of that. I haven't seen any changes. I'm aware that they do a range—beauty, bricklaying and a number of English programs. They do some of the high school equivalents.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you have a beauty treatment while you were there, or not that time?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, I haven't.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Maybe next time.

Mr STEVE WHAN: They've offered me all sorts of things.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm sure they do.

Mr STEVE WHAN: As you'd probably be aware, a lot of the people who do trades training in our Canberra region go across to the CIT in Canberra to do that. The New South Wales Government helps the ACT pay for that. My son-in-law, for example, did his trades training across the border in the ACT. The CIT probably performs a lot of that role for Queanbeyan, but I'll come back to you about whether the number has changed at all.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. On the Kurri Kurri TAFE campus, I understand you were up there earlier this year. In terms of the content for apprentices in heavy vehicle mechanics and having to go to Tamworth, is that still occurring?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It has been very challenging at Kurri Kurri. I think two of our new teachers are going to Kurri Kurri. What we have had a real challenge with at Kurri Kurri—I think I might have mentioned it at a previous hearing—is that we've recruited teachers there and then they've tended to be attracted out to the mining industry, so we've had some difficulties in retaining them. I've sat down with Clayton Barr, the local member, and other local members in the area around this with industry. TAFE and the industry have been working very closely together to try to come up with some solutions in this, some of which is recruiting additional teachers and some of which is talking to industry about whether they'd like to have some of their employees become TAFE teachers.

Interestingly—not in Kurri Kurri—in Broken Hill we've had some success in that, with a mining company nominating someone to do the training and then work a day or so a week in TAFE. Kurri Kurri for a while, to overcome the backlog, was asking people to travel some distance. We are working very hard to try to overcome that. That is a course that, for a little while, had a waiting list in my understanding. Again, we're working very hard to try to overcome that because we recognise that is a problem. Perhaps Ms Read could elaborate on that.

CHLOE READ: Only to reinforce what you said. As I said, I met with cohorts at Paid to Learn, and the two teachers that are going to do mobile plant and heavy vehicle at Kurri were actually on my table, so it was really exciting to talk to them. One of them, from memory, had done his apprenticeship at TAFE and was really

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excited to be coming back to be a TAFE teacher and to train his profession into the future. As you said, with the Broken Hill example, he was on the same table. It was really good to see both of those.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Our challenge is then to retain them. That's why TAFE teachers have had the biggest pay increase in 20 years. That's why we're trying to work with them on conditions and all those sorts of things.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'll move on. I don't have much time. Thanks for that, Minister. Picking up on some of the questions from the Chair before in terms of some of the courses that are being offered, you'd be aware, Minister, that there was a Daily Telegraph story not that long ago. It was reported that TAFE has frozen its second semester intake for a raft of critical trades, saying that they won't be available until at least 2026. Are you saying that that's inaccurate?

Mr STEVE WHAN: It was inaccurate, yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Also in that article—and this is coming from local feedback, and I've spoken to you before about the offerings, particularly in regional communities, and supporting local industry—there were concerns about what was being offered, particularly in the New England and north-west. Students in Armidale were turned away from a certificate II engineering course. Is that correct?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Can I ask TAFE to specifically talk about Armidale? My understanding is some of the areas there had low enrolments.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I can come back to that this afternoon. While I've got you, Minister, are you aware—

Mr STEVE WHAN: I saw those reports and I did ask questions about those. I'm also aware that we recently invested in a fairly substantial upgrade in the machinery and equipment at Tamworth TAFE in engineering. That is providing high-quality facilities there as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Just on that, Minister, local businesses—and I'll give an example of one in Tamworth, which is Obieco Industries. I acknowledge the work of Kevin Anderson, the member for Tamworth. They are saying there has been zero consultation with industry over which courses there are a demand for and saying that all of these courses are being cancelled. Why is that happening in a place like Tamworth when industry demand is there?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think I've met with that business. I've invited them to actually be talking to TAFE about the demand. One of the things which we're trying to do at the moment out of the Skills Plan is move to a regional planning model for skills across the whole sector, not just TAFE. We had a session planning for that in Wagga just recently. We need industry to talk to us and tell us what they see their demand as being so that we can actually allocate. The difficulty we sometimes have is when we're not seeing the demand and then people just say, "Well, it's not available, so we won't take someone on."

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: My understanding is that there were engineering courses up there advertised, in the New England area. Then the courses were cancelled, but no-one knew about it, so some who had enrolled were unsure about what that meant. Can you elaborate on that?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We certainly do our best to keep anyone enrolled informed. I'll ask Ms Read or Ms Tickle to—

CHLOE READ: We might get Mr Hawkins.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Sorry, Mr Hawkins—to talk to that. We certainly try to communicate. As I said to you earlier, one of the things about the way that the contestable market, the Smart and Skilled model, has worked in the past is that there was a pretty hard cap on the numbers that you needed to have in a course, and they could be cancelled the day before. That's something that we want to get away from, and I'll be absolutely clear about that. We want to get away from that sort of situation. We won't be able to run courses with three people or six people, but we want to get to a more predictable pathway on that, and part of that is to make sure that we are engaging regularly with industry and hearing from them about demand and maybe saying to them, "Are there two or three businesses that know that they want to put on an apprentice in this area in the next couple of years? Could we all do it together so we get enough people?" Perhaps Mr Hawkins can elaborate on that New England situation.

MARK HAWKINS: I can provide an update around that. As the Minister was correct, we did have a meeting with those constituents and the local member. As an update, the executive director of the relevant faculty met with Obieco last week in regard to—I think there were two qualifications; you are correct. One was in the cert II engineering; the other one was cert IV in engineering. After those discussions with them, we're looking at generating a cohort, to the Minister's point of working with industry, to get the numbers we need. That was a really positive outcome. Our plan is to look at how we deliver what I call the virtual delivery. I always get a bit

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nervous when people say "online", because virtual delivery actually means it's teacher-led with a virtual cohort—but also combining that with a mixed delivery mode as well. Those conversations have been had as of last week in regard to cert II in engineering. We're also working with Career Connect and Obieco up there about what it might look like to have a cohort start up there in regard to that course. That's a recent update.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there a time frame on when you would hope to be able to see those courses available?

MARK HAWKINS: I would expect that as soon as we see the numbers get generated, and, working with Obieco, I would imagine that we would look for semester 1 of 2026. Without being held to account, that's what we were working towards. But it was a really great discussion last week with Obieco. We followed up pretty much after that meeting we had with the Minister's office.

CHLOE READ: I think that speaks really strongly to how that regional planning and engagement with industry needs to look and is going to develop into the future. There's often just this disconnect between places saying that there aren't enough places or there are no places, and we're like, "We don't have any enrolments to run a course." Actually working together, you find that there are people who are interested in working with schools. You find that there are students who might want to transition after school into doing that. That's the sort of work that we are doing together, and it's a good example of it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Minister, I just want to turn to the university sector. I know that other colleagues on the Committee have asked questions about that today. You said that you don't want to intervene in the day-to-day operations of the universities. I'm paraphrasing a little bit.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I don't have the power to do that, if I wanted to.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate that. In terms the job cuts that we're seeing in the university sector, what do you see your role is as the Minister responsible for that portfolio area in New South Wales? Do you liaise with your Federal counterparts around what you can do to support particularly those people who are going to be unemployed? How do you see your role?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I want to be clear that there is a national issue here, and it's not just New South Wales universities that are facing this. I live in Queanbeyan, so I'm seeing the ANU getting a lot of flak over its decisions as well. There are some national issues here, which need to be considered. We are seeing the Federal Government establishing oversight bodies for universities, which can have a role in some of these issues. In some of the governance issues, particularly, we've got the expert panel that I mentioned before. My power is quite limited. As I said before, I can ask for information from the universities. The Auditor-General can look into things, but I can't direct.

What I do do is have conversations with the vice-chancellors. They inform me sometimes of what they're doing. I've written back and asked further questions or emphasised the importance of good consultation processes. But, again, I can't tell them that—well, I can't direct them in any way. It is a very limited role, in a lot of senses. I will be awaiting the outcome of the expert panel's views on this, but we do also participate at a national level in ministerial councils, discussing a number of issues around the Universities Accord and the reforms that have been undertaken at the Federal level to deal with governance, to deal with setting up with a national ombudsman and a range of those sorts of things.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You say you meet with the vice-chancellors. In terms of accountability or asking questions about the decisions that they're making, ensuring governance is appropriate, you don't—

Mr STEVE WHAN: A lot of that power is with the Commonwealth to do that. The Commonwealth has the levers that allow them to do that and the regulatory power that allows that, because they took over the responsibility for universities. Perhaps Mr Dizdar could add.

MURAT DIZDAR: If it's helpful, Ms Mitchell, the Commonwealth has set up ATEC, the Australian Tertiary Education Commission. It got it going this year, with interim arrangements, but long term that's the overarching body to drive, across the country, action on some of these issues.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I might come back to that this afternoon, with respect, Mr Dizdar. While I've got the Minister—

Mr STEVE WHAN: There are a number of national initiatives underway, which are dealing with some of the issues that have been raised over the last few years. There have been a number of issues raised. We saw a strong focus on campus safety for a while. We've seen a focus on the quality of educational products in some areas. We've seen the focus on the viability of universities. To be fair, the Commonwealth has been working

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through a lot of those things through the accord process. We've been involved in that but not directing, and the powers are limited.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'll take you to another area of consultants' fees. Just to pick one example, last year Macquarie University, I'm told, spent over \$64 million on consultants' fees. Do you have any oversight in terms of what they're spending that money on? Do they report to you in relation to that? Do you provide feedback?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We get their annual reports, which the Auditor can look into. I can ask for specific information on commercial activities.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you? Have you, for Macquarie University?

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, I haven't had anything specifically raised that would make me want to feel that I needed to do that. The issues around consultancies, I would philosophically support the view that they should look at in-house services, as we are doing in TAFE, and reducing the consultancy spend on curriculum development.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: But have you communicated to vice-chancellors that you would suggest—

Mr STEVE WHAN: We do discuss a range of these issues when we talk, but, again, I don't have the power to direct. Fundamentally, I do want to emphasise again that the regulatory power on universities sits with the Commonwealth because of the way that they took over this space, using corporations powers. But we need to acknowledge that university councils are the governing bodies. Like any governing body, they need to make the decisions around how their institution works and not be subject to outside direct direction in that process.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the casualisation of the workforce in universities—and noting your earlier comments about concerns that a casual role can be difficult for people, and I appreciate that was in a TAFE context. Again, there are lots of different examples of staff who would be losing their jobs at UTS, Macquarie and other areas. Do you speak to the vice-chancellors or require them to provide information to you about what they're doing with their teaching positions?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Not on casualisation, but I have asked for them to report to me previously around rectification of underpayments, and I have had reports from them about that. That's something which I did feel that it was important for me to follow up on.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the job cuts or the staff cuts more generally, have you had any discussions with the vice-chancellors in New South Wales about whether there can be a change in pace in terms of rolling it out over a period of time to lessen the impact on the professional staff at these universities? Has that been part of your discussions?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think we need to recognise that the councils need to manage their universities. I have certainly had a discussion or briefing or letters from most of the vice-chancellors who were affected by these budgetary challenges about what they were doing to address it, but I haven't been seeking to direct them in any way about how they should deal with this. It's for their governing bodies to do that. I will wait, as I said, for the outcome of the expert panel consideration on governance to see whether or not that has implications for the legislation at the State level.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of your conversations with your Federal counterpart around the course offerings, the job cuts, the funding, it's a very challenging time for a lot of people working in the university sector.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It is.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: How often do you speak to your Federal counterpart? What are those discussions like and, I guess, what are you putting on the table for New South Wales universities?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Obviously there are ministerial council meetings that talk about a number of these things, but I've also recently had a briefing from the expert panel around where they were heading with their review. We have input into things like the make-up of some of the Federal bodies. I did note that Jason Clare recently referred the ANU to TEQSA to have a look at complaints that have been made there. That was referred to the federally established body.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: If you had complaints about a specific university in New South Wales referred to you, is that something that you could also request Minister Clare to do?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I could forward them on—yes, I could do that.

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The CHAIR: Within TAFE, how many public interest disclosure investigations are currently underway?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I will ask Ms Read or Ms Tickle.

JULIE TICKLE: In the financial year 2025, 48 public interest disclosure reports were received and classified as PIDs; 29 additional reports were received but not classified as PIDs. That's in the financial year 2025. From then to now, I'd have to take on notice what the current open number is.

The CHAIR: What's the process between deciding what should just be a performance management procedure versus what should be a PID investigation?

JULIE TICKLE: Since July 2023, we've had a unit called the integrity unit. That unit looks after both fraud and corruption, and performance and conduct. We have some investigators in that unit that make a determination under the PID regulations around what is classified as a PID because it's a very narrow definition, and that is how they classify them. Sometimes a matter might come in that in the beginning doesn't necessarily look like a PID and then becomes a PID as they look into it. It just depends on the complexity of the matter, how many people are involved in the matter—that kind of thing.

The CHAIR: Are PID investigations more costly than performance management?

JULIE TICKLE: It really depends on the nature of the matter, again. Sometimes a PID disclosure can be quite simple and straightforward, and a performance and conduct matter can be more complex. It really depends on the matter.

The CHAIR: I might come back to some of those this afternoon. When I was asking before about availability of courses, I think, Minister, you said there were 25 that offered—

Mr STEVE WHAN: Twenty-five campuses that offered it.

The CHAIR: Twenty-five campuses offered that course, but that's out of, what, 130?

Mr STEVE WHAN: There are 154 campuses across the State, some of which are connected learning centres.

The CHAIR: Has that number of campuses that it's available at increased or decreased over time?

Mr STEVE WHAN: Obviously there's some specific technology that is needed in those campuses. I'll get Ms Read. If we can't answer it, we'll take it on notice.

CHLOE READ: I would say we've got good growth in the number of enrolments in electrotech type areas, but I'd need to take on notice the specifics of change over time and in particular did we offer it in one place that we—

The CHAIR: And whether they're in-person or online as well, if there's a comparison.

Mr STEVE WHAN: There's a practical component of electrotechnology that has to be in-person at some campus, but, yes, there is some blended delivery, as I understand it—

CHLOE READ: Yes, there might be some virtual delivery block release.

Mr STEVE WHAN: —to maybe reduce the number of times a person has to travel.

The CHAIR: That would be useful. From the research I've been able to do, TAFE looks like it has partnerships, collaborations or program interactions at least with a number of weapons manufacturing companies, including Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems, Boeing and some others. Do you have a full list of the weapons—Thales, that's the other one. Are there any weapons companies that TAFE works with?

Mr STEVE WHAN: I'll have to ask Ms Read to take that on notice.

CHLOE READ: I'll take it on notice.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think in the aviation sector we obviously have collaborations, because that is a focus for some of our TAFE campuses in terms of aviation and also advanced manufacturing for the manufacturing centres of excellence. I'll take the specifics on notice.

The CHAIR: That would be useful. I'm just trying to get an understanding of how integrated the weapons companies are with the universities and with TAFE as well.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, if I could just pick up the Bankstown TAFE issue. If I could just confirm that you said earlier that the combined Bankstown hospital and TAFE site arrangement has been cancelled.

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Mr STEVE WHAN: No, I didn't say "cancelled". I said that the final location for the permanent TAFE has not been determined.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But, Minister, we were led to believe for the last two years that Bankstown TAFE was to be reinstated to the new hospital site and this was a big win. We now learn today that that combined hospital-TAFE site is no longer in place. The Government has walked away from this.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I think we learnt when we announced the site that the TAFE was going for five years to the Western Sydney University tower. Certainly, from when I last came to estimates to now, the project changed.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But, Minister, I've had to join this together in the absence of disclosure, no announcement—

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, there was an announcement.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: —secret deals. It's all with Health. The Minister sits here today and says, "Didn't you pick it up? I told you for five years there'll be a temporary relocation." They were never going to be part of the plan. We've been misled.

Mr STEVE WHAN: It would be hard for me to be saying anything for five years since you were in government five years ago and completely ballsed up the project from the start. We've fixed the project. A magnificent hospital is going to be built. It is true that when I last appeared at this estimates, I was not aware of the full cost it was going to be for the hospital, and that has led to a situation where we haven't been able to make the final decision yet on the location for the TAFE. But the rest of your characterisations, you are well aware, is just politics—and pretty cheap politics at that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, TAFE NSW Bankstown campus has been in operation for 50 years. That site, being the new Bankstown hospital site, was put to the public, put to the election, put to the people—

Mr STEVE WHAN: No, it wasn't, actually.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: —put to the students that TAFE NSW would be reinstated back at that new campus. That no longer stands.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I don't actually think that's the case. We can go back through the history of the announcements.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Minister, I have got a printed-out announcement here of the TAFE NSW website, and it reads, "TAFE NSW update: Construction on the new combined Bankstown hospital and TAFE NSW site is expected to begin in 2026." And then it continues with the completion "2032". That no longer stands.

Mr STEVE WHAN: What is the date of that?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: This was a recent—this is information that was publicly made available. I might have pulled this off in the last 24 hours or the last week. I don't have a date on that.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Interesting.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But I'm telling you the public information and—

Mr STEVE WHAN: As for your—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: There is the absence of the announcement today that TAFE no longer is part of the new hospital site.

Mr STEVE WHAN: If you'd seen the announcement of the actual hospital project—we made it clear at the time where TAFE was going. I was actually asked about it by the journalists, and they appeared on television news.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: But why the secrecy, Minister?

Mr STEVE WHAN: There is no secrecy. That was the day the project was announced.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I have come to this conclusion today, and you said, "Took you a while."

Mr STEVE WHAN: Maybe you need to pay a bit more attention to the media reports that were going on when—

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The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Where is your announcement?

Mr STEVE WHAN: We made an announcement.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order: We have only got a few seconds, but we've listened to this sort of exchange enough, and I think Ms Merton might let the Minister answer the question, which I think he was—

The CHAIR: I uphold the point of order.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Thank you. You made a point before: You suggested that people had been misled for five years. The only thing that happened five years ago was that they were waiting on a Coalition promise which didn't emerge. At the last election, the Labor Party promised to build a hospital. My understanding is we finalised the site post-election. Once the clear cost of the hospital was found, we were then able to progress the planning for TAFE. The key thing for the people of Bankstown is that they will have that TAFE there in the Western Sydney University building for the next five years. It will offer more services to the community, and we will also have for that community an amazing hospital, a \$2 billion hospital, which will be servicing the needs of the community for many years to come. So I think there is a lot there for the Bankstown community to be very positive about. I recognise that we had not been able to clarify, until we announced the hospital site earlier this year, the location for TAFE and that we still have some final decisions, but TAFE services and vocational training will be provided in the Bankstown CBD.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Minister, in your last answer you referenced the non-delivery of the previous Government's election commitments. I wondered if you could contrast that with giving us a bit of an update of where the Labor Government is on its election commitments.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. I'm really pleased to be able to do that. Thank you. We made a really strong commitment to rebuilding the vocational education training system in New South Wales. We conducted a review of the vocational education system. We promised 1,000 new apprentices and trainees across the New South Wales public sector by 30 June 2026. As at 30 June this year, 653 of those had started, and I'm really pleased to say that the completion rate for those apprentices and trainees is outstanding, well above averages for other areas. In 2025-26 we promised around 80 per cent of the overall skills budget will be going to TAFE, and we made a commitment to establish three manufacturing centres of excellence. They are all up and running already. They are already delivering courses. I think it is really exciting. We're also investing \$25 million to establish a Hydrogen centre of excellence in Glenwood, in partnership with the plumbing industry and PICAC, the Plumbing Industry Climate Action Centre, which is a really exciting part of the transition work that we are doing in New South Wales, and I'm pleased to see that, after a longish planning process there, they are almost ready to progress on that.

There is some really strong work going on in the regions as well. I mentioned skills planning in the regions. That's been something that I, as a regional member of Parliament, think is really important because I'm very well aware that in different parts of New South Wales they see their future as being differently focused, in terms of the industries they will have. In the areas around the Riverina, agriculture and manufacturing are very important, among others. In some parts of New South Wales, the REZs and mining remain important. So it is important for us to be able to tailor that planning for delivery of educational services. I'm really pleased we're making progress on that.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Thanks, Minister. I was going to ask you for a bit more about the regions, but you've covered that. So I wondered if you could take us through the work that the Government is doing to improve access and students' support in TAFE but across the skill sector more generally.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Yes. Thanks. One of the key things we did when we came into government was recognise that we needed to be able to provide more support for disadvantaged students, and we did that with what sounds like a really simple change: allowing students to get more than one loading if they had multiple disabilities. That meant that they could actually access additional funds, rather than being limited to a single area of support. That helps students with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students or long-term unemployed students. We had, as at 27 May 2025, over 10,000 Smart and Skilled commencements by students with a disability. That, I think, reflects the fact that we are trying to ensure that we don't leave anyone behind.

In talking about an economy with massive workforce skills, we just can't afford to have people who just don't get access to the appropriate wraparound support that they need to actually engage in training and then become a member of the workforce. We know how important that is. We have got some really exciting programs like the Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment grants, which are for Aboriginal people; opportunity hubs supporting Aboriginal young people; and the Barrangirra program with support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

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learners through culturally appropriate mentoring. And disability services are really important right throughout our system, including at TAFE, where we have 93 New South Wales disability teacher consultants.

I just want to highlight one really exciting program that we're doing with the digital sector. The digital pathways pledge is a pledge which many of our biggest companies, led by companies like Microsoft and many of the big digital employers around the State and many public service departments, have undertaken to get 20 per cent of their recruitments through alternative pathways. Traditionally, that is a sector which has got most of its new hires out of degree courses, and they are now really actively working and sharing information about how they get vocationally trained students, how they get students from remote and regional areas and from disadvantaged backgrounds, from Indigenous communities and so on. I have been at a number of signing events with them where these big companies are signing on and are actually starting to see results already. That's been quite an exciting way of seeing some of those disadvantages of access into some of those areas overcome.

The CHAIR: Thank you. That does conclude our time with you, Minister. Thank you very much for your attendance. We will be taking a lunchbreak, and we will be back at two o'clock.

(The Minister withdrew.)

(Luncheon adjournment)

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I welcome everybody back. If I could have a look at the Northern Beaches TAFE campus. Ms Read, I know we spoke about this a little bit earlier, but I wonder if you might be able to elaborate in terms of the services or the staff at that campus? I have reports, in terms of the move to centralise services within TAFE, that some of these campuses now have an absence of marketing people and an absence of student coordinators on the campus. I wonder if you might be able to elaborate on that?

CHLOE READ: I think I will take on notice the specifics relating to the Northern Beaches campus, but what I would say is something that Ms Tickle alluded to earlier in one of her answers, which is that really quite a lot of the roles that we have in TAFE NSW are location agnostic. We have people working in various different teams all over the State because we have that big campus footprint. As I said, I'll take the specifics on notice, but the bringing together of different functions that might have been regionally based into centralised functions doesn't necessarily imply that we would centralise the staff in terms of the location from which they had to work. Ms Tickle, do you have anything else you want to say about that?

JULIE TICKLE: No, that's right. I look after the people group—so traditional HR functions—and we've got people across the State. You can really do those corporate support roles from anywhere. Obviously on the campuses we have student-facing support—so student services representatives and obviously the teachers, of course—but a lot of the roles are location agnostic.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Tickle, just in reference to that, I also have a report of the absence of a campus-based student coordinator at Northern Beaches.

JULIE TICKLE: We'd have to take that on notice in terms of who actually works at the Northern Beaches. Quite often we have people who look after a couple of campuses, so that may be one of those cases, but we'll take it on notice and let you know.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I just want to go back to the manufacturing centres of excellence again. I think the Minister said before lunch that they're all open and operating. Is that correct?

CHLOE READ: Yes, that's correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Was hydrogen the one he has talked about as well? Didn't he mention that?

CHLOE READ: The plumbing?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes.

CHLOE READ: That's a question for the department.

JEREMY KURUCZ: Yes, that's being delivered. It's a Hydrogen Centre of Excellence. That's currently going through the planning approval process at the moment with, I think, Blacktown City Council.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there a time frame on the delivery for that?

JEREMY KURUCZ: Not a specific time frame at the moment, given that it's still going through the planning procedure at the moment. But if we have further information, I'd be happy to take that on notice and come back to you though.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, the Minister touched on some of these in his questions from the Government before lunch. But the thousand apprenticeships commitment, what are the numbers of how many have been recruited and how many applications?

MURAT DIZDAR: I can help there, Ms Mitchell. As at 10 June this year, we have 640 new apprentices and trainees that have commenced. Under the public sector commitment, they're to have a thousand apprenticeships and traineeships. I can also say that we're monitoring really closely how we're tracking and, very pleasingly, we've so far got a 94 per cent retention rate in that program, which is excellent.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Are they the figures from round one? I think you gave that last time.

MURAT DIZDAR: We're up to—Mr Kurucz and Ms Lawrence might dive in—I'm going to say round three.

AMANDA LAWRENCE: That's right. We've just opened round three.

JEREMY KURUCZ: But to clarify, Ms Mitchell, the figures that we've just provided to you were rounds one and two, so we would have provided roughly the same figures to you in estimates earlier this year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: About 94 per cent?

JEREMY KURUCZ: Yes, correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So the 640 that you just mentioned, Mr Dizdar, is from round one and two. Is that correct?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And then round three is open for applications now?

MURAT DIZDAR: It hasn't closed yet.

AMANDA LAWRENCE: It opened yesterday for applications.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Perfect timing.

MURAT DIZDAR: If anyone's watching, we'd encourage them to apply.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm sure there are thousands who are tuning in this afternoon. You might have a flurry of activity this afternoon. Fingers crossed.

MURAT DIZDAR: It's a fantastic program.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there a breakdown of those 640 in terms of who's studying through TAFE or RTOs? How does that work in practice?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Lawrence, do we have any of that?

AMANDA LAWRENCE: I don't have that information here today, but we certainly do have it and I can get that for you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great. I know we talked about this a little bit last time, but in terms of future career pathways for those in those roles, now that you're a couple of rounds in, what funding is there for that going forward? Where do you envisage those trainees and apprentices going on to work? How does that look in practice?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's a \$93.5 million program to deliver the thousand. Ms Lawrence might expand on what exit outcomes we're trying to work on.

AMANDA LAWRENCE: A large number of the completions will go on to work in an ongoing capacity within government, which is fantastic. Once they are qualified, they can use that qualification broadly.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I was never responsible for this particular portfolio, but they can get the qualification and then if jobs are open within government agencies, they can apply and hopefully stay, or if they want to go out into the private sector, that's a matter for them?

AMANDA LAWRENCE: That's exactly right.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have a KPI in terms of the percentage that you'd like to see retained in the public service, or is it open to the participants?

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MURAT DIZDAR: The commitment was just to deliver the thousand, but we're very keen because when I talk to my secretary colleagues, all agencies are investing. If you're investing in that, you're very keen to keep them with you. The retention rate is showing that the program is successful. We don't have a specific target on public sector employment, but we'd be very hopeful that we can, in those agencies, have good employment rates.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And you're on track for the thousand to be done and recruited by 2026, as per the commitment?

MURAT DIZDAR: We certainly believe so, and we're working hard to do that. If the first two rounds are anything to go by, we're almost two-thirds of the way there. We're aiming to be able to meet that target.

AMANDA LAWRENCE: In each round so far, the applications have been oversubscribed.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm happy for you to take this on notice, but do you have how many applications versus commencements for the first two rounds? If you've got it, that's great.

AMANDA LAWRENCE: I do. For round one, we received 499 applications, and 221 apprentices and trainees commenced. In round two, we received 669 applications and 432 roles commenced.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: They're encouraging figures. That sounds good.

AMANDA LAWRENCE: They're great.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The local government apprenticeships, which is 1,300—which is separate to the thousand—again, how's that tracking in terms of the applications process? What's that looking like now?

JEREMY KURUCZ: We're not responsible for that one, Ms Mitchell, within the Education portfolio. The Office of Local Government is responsible for working in partnership with local councils on this. We do provide local councils with some support on the ground around supervisory and monitoring requirements in relation to apprenticeships and traineeships, but the Office of Local Government is delivering that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: They do all of that, but you don't have any oversight other than that you provide that advice if asked? But the numbers and reaching the—

AMANDA LAWRENCE: We don't have any oversight and we don't administer, but we do work closely with their team and we share lots of insights.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Which I actually think we talked about last time, now that I've asked you about it. On the broader issue around people, there was a specific article in April that was in *The Sydney Morning Herald* around effectively tradies buying fake qualifications. There have been some with links to organised crime syndicates and people who are impersonating genuine training providers. I think the Building Commission may have been able to cancel licences if they've come through in a fraudulent way. But in terms of that particular issue—and it's obviously a few months since that was reported on—how do you combat that? Are there any updates you could provide in relation to that issue?

MURAT DIZDAR: Great question. My colleagues might add to this. I know you'll know this, but ASQA, the Australian Skills Quality Authority, are the national regulator of RTOs. We work closely with them. They've been given enhanced Commonwealth funding to be more diligent around their compliance actions. You'll know that in May 2025—and this has all been reported in the press—they cancelled the registrations of three RTOs: Contract Me Pty Ltd, Qualify Now Pty Ltd and SPES Education Pty Ltd. The good thing is that they work closely with us, like they do across the nation, to let us know that this is pending. These were in different employment fields, so we can work with those.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: One was an early childhood provider, I think.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's right. There were four other cancellations in October last year. I can tell you that of those seven cancellations, none of them were being given State funding or part of our program funding. What had a potential big impact by way of cancellations of employment didn't come to fruition. My colleagues might be able to give you some more detail on that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be good.

JEREMY KURUCZ: We work really closely with ASQA, as the secretary outlined before, in terms of our day-to-day responsibilities in the government-subsidised training market. So it was pleasing to see that in the instances the secretary talked to, there was not a high level of RTOs being funded by the New South Wales Government through our government-subsidised training market. We are sharing information with ASQA on a

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regular basis in relation to compliance activities as part of our regular monitoring program under Smart and Skilled.

We're obviously undertaking similar checks in Smart and Skilled, looking at indicators in relation to things such as RPL student completions and looking at provider behaviour to make sure that we've got the right checks in place to make sure that if you're receiving government-subsidised training in New South Wales, that is of the quality we expect under Smart and Skilled. But, more broadly, we're working with ASQA about the overall integrity of the VET sector and making sure that people are confident that, when they're doing VET in New South Wales, it's of a high quality and they're getting the skills and capabilities they need from it.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the compliance work and the checks and things, how often is that occurring? What does that look like? Do people do random inspections? Do they go to those services? Can you talk us through that?

JEREMY KURUCZ: Ms Lawrence might be able to share some further information with you.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be great.

JEREMY KURUCZ: But what I would say is that we've got two really important pieces for this in New South Wales in the subsidised training system. The first is the Smart and Skilled contract and the other is the NSW Quality Framework. They are our two foundational documents for people that want to undertake government-subsidised training in New South Wales as an RTO. So they're really important. Ms Lawrence can probably give you some details about what it looks like on the ground on a day-to-day basis.

AMANDA LAWRENCE: As Jeremy and the secretary have touched on, for our Smart and Skilled RTOs, it's essential that they have a valid ASQA registration to be a Smart and Skilled provider. If ASQA makes a cancellation of any of those RTOs, we also cancel their Smart and Skilled contract. In terms of on-the-ground monitoring, as the regulator of apprentices and trainees, we have a role in monitoring learners in workplaces. We do regular visits to learners. We sit with and work with both students and their employers, as well as RTOs. We know from lots of years of monitoring visits that those in-person visits increase completion rates by around 10 per cent or 11 per cent. So they're really worthwhile. In the last 18 months, we've been really focusing on increasing our visits to learners, with the number increasing from over 22,000 in 2023 to over 31,000 last year. So far this year, we've completed over 14,000 monitoring visits to apprentices and trainees in workplaces.

MURAT DIZDAR: If it's helpful, Ms Mitchell, I can let you know that since Smart and Skill began we've removed 117 funded RTOs that didn't meet standard, aside from ASQA.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of that, I'm curious about two areas: one being early childhood and the other one being the building and construction trades. If someone has received their qualification through one of these organisations that you then find to be not up to scratch and you cancel them or they're fraudulent, like I mentioned earlier, what happens in practice to the person who has that qualification, piece of paper—whatever? How do you weed out the people who were qualified, even though they might not have met the benchmark?

MURAT DIZDAR: Top question.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Does that make sense?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes. It's a great question. I asked the same thing when we were walking through this process. It is painstaking.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes. It would be hard.

MURAT DIZDAR: That's why you've got to work closely with ASQA and then in 6,400 services here in New South Wales. My colleagues will talk to it, but, pleasingly, I was briefed that the vast majority were not employed anyway—they weren't out there—which was great. The riding instructions we gave said that if someone was employed thinking they've got a valid qualification, what support could we wrap around them—because it may not have been their fault—to help them meet the requirements? But my colleagues might have more detail.

JEREMY KURUCZ: There are probably two particular instances that we should be clear about in this conversation. With some of the instances that were reported in the media, particularly in terms of RPL and the links with certain training providers within the migration system, they're what ASQA refers to as "integrity matters", because it goes to the fact that, essentially, a training provider hasn't delivered any training whatsoever. There's been fraudulent activity in relation to recognition of prior learning and there's been no evidence whatsoever that that person actually engaged in any kind of training, teaching or learning with a private provider. So we have that type of challenge, which the secretary spoke to before, where a majority of those people weren't actually working in the industry. You would have found that they didn't have the skills, experience and expertise to operate

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in that industry because they never had any kind of training delivered to them by a provider. They're the providers that aren't funded by Smart and Skilled, which we referenced before.

The 117 figure that the secretary referenced earlier goes to some of the work that we do, and that ASQA does, that is more about the fact that training is happening but people might not necessarily be meeting some of the requirements. For instance, they may not be delivering all the units of competency that they're required to, they may not be completing all the assessment tasks they're required to or there may be questions in relation to the way that the RTO itself is owned and managed, but there is still some evidence of training activity actually happening. When we look at what support we're going to put around people that are affected by it, we have more of an opportunity to work with TAFE and with other providers to funnel people in to essentially catch up or make up courses or training where there's evidence that training has happened before. It is much more difficult for us to do that in the integrity matters, where no training has happened whatsoever and it has been part of a migration challenge or some other fraudulent part of the training or other system as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That makes sense. Do you have any data on—and I appreciate what you're saying about the two streams—how many individuals, maybe even with the catch-up approach, you've had to do that with and in what areas? On notice is fine. I don't expect it now.

MURAT DIZDAR: We'll see what we've got. I'm not sure if we've got that data, but we'll go back and have a look.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm just trying to understand how frequently that occurs and the scale of the issue.

JEREMY KURUCZ: If there is a circumstance where we're engaging with a Smart and Skilled provider and we're giving them notice that we intend to suspend their contract or terminate them, we are certainly then looking at the impact on students. Depending on the particular circumstance that we are giving the provider notice for, we might work with them alongside them to teach out the students they've got with appropriate support in place. Or, depending on the nature of concerns we have, we might refer them to another training provider, such as TAFE or another independent provider that we fund in that area, to make sure they can continue their training. So it really depends on the particular circumstance as well.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Who is eligible for tenders for funding for EVET, external vocational educational training?

MURAT DIZDAR: My colleagues might dive in here as well. There's VET that's offered in schools. That's run by our own qualified teachers. They're run in high schools and central schools. The Minister referenced the Education Pathways Program earlier this morning, which is in 183 secondary schools. That's our workforce. We partner with Ms Read's fantastic workforce, which provides qualifications and training. We run TVET with Ms Read's workforce on her campuses. Some of her staff also work in some of our settings to deliver that. EVET is also an opportunity to partner with TAFE and other providers.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of who's eligible, is it TAFE and training providers?

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

JEREMY KURUCZ: Yes. I would just add, Ms Merton, that it is subject to a procurement process. That process is currently closed at the moment, but it is subject to a procurement process, where TAFE and other providers can put in an application to participate to deliver that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: How does the procurement process for EVET run in terms of the time frame?

MURAT DIZDAR: Just like our standard procurement processes on the procurement website: following all government procurement guidelines.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: How long are the tenders in place for?

MURAT DIZDAR: I would have to take that on notice because it varies and differs depending on the types of courses, the regions, and what student demand and the profile of demand in the future might look like. There's a range of factors that might influence how long that procurement process might take, and when it might open as well.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I ask because I've been notified by a provider, which is a Christian-based training provider, who was unsuccessful in an application. They're telling me, "We've got to wait three to four years now." I guess my question is to that time period, that's all.

MURAT DIZDAR: With what regularity do we go out to the market?

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The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Yes, what is the time frame that's usually followed?

MURAT DIZDAR: Normally we go out and we're looking for providers to provide for a few years. There's no set standard. It will depend on what we're chasing, what offerings we're looking at, where it might vary. Please let that provider know that they should just get directly in contact with us if they're—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Yes, I think they have and it's been confirmed, hence the concerns and wanting the Committee to know it's now a three- to four-year wait for them before they could re-tender for this. The other frustrating thing would be, in terms of their training service, they meet some of the critical skills areas that we're looking at. So I wonder if you might want to take it on notice or something—in terms of EVET, the availability of the funding, the time frame, are people who are unsuccessful waiting three to four years for the opportunity to re-tender?

MURAT DIZDAR: I appreciate what you're saying. The good news here is it's a very competitive market. You want to make sure you get good quality providers coming through, so that's a good position to be in. Maybe you can give us the specifics outside of this and we're happy to follow-up with them. We can come back to you on notice about our general operational guidelines around it.

The CHAIR: Can I just come back to the issues we were discussing earlier around TAFE and cert III in electrotechnology. I know that some of that was taken on notice but I believe what the Minister was saying—or the impression I got—was that it was felt that it was a fabricated claim and that there was no issue with campuses being unable to accept for semester 2. I've gone back and had a look. My information is that cert III in electrotechnology was unable to accept for semester 2 at Meadowbank, Miller, St George, Ultimo, Wollongong, Northern Beaches, Mount Druitt and Hornsby.

CHLOE READ: As I said before, I will take that on notice. The Minister—I'm not sure that he thought it's a fabrication but perhaps a point in time and to do with some media reporting in particular, maybe. Certainly the profile of enrolments will change as we approach semester 2 and then are into it; we're quite a way into semester 2 now. I don't know if Mr Hawkins has anything else that we managed to find. We did make some inquiries in the break about things. I think there was one, but I don't think it's any of the campuses that you mentioned. Was it Orange?

MARK HAWKINS: Yes. I think, Ms Boyd, you asked about if there'd been any cancellations of cert III electrotech courses or offerings.

The CHAIR: I did, yes. That's one of them.

MARK HAWKINS: By way of an update, there was. There were two part-time offerings that were cancelled at Orange as a result of no applications or enrolments. That did not impact school-based apprenticeship delivery of cert III electrotech at Orange.

CHLOE READ: That list you gave me was slightly bigger, wasn't it?

The CHAIR: Yes.

CHLOE READ: It'll come through as a question on notice and we'll go and find, specifically for those campuses, what are we offering, how many students and can we still accept enrolments now—noting that after a certain point in time, you do need to move to the next term or the next semester because you've missed delivery.

The CHAIR: That'll be really useful. Looking to before, when semester 2 was still open, my understanding is they were the ones. I think I read out eight of them. Also, just to clarify, in case there's a misunderstanding as well, is it possible that in the data you have that the campuses couldn't accept conventional enrolments but they could still accept the online component but then students are still having to travel somewhere else to get—if you could just have a look as to whether there's something to explain people's experiences.

CHLOE READ: Yes, let's see if we can nut out some of that complexity. Yes, definitely.

The CHAIR: Going back to the public interest disclosure investigations, how many of them are currently underway? I think we said 48.

JULIE TICKLE: We have 21 open ongoing investigations from the 100 new matters that I talked about for the last financial year.

CHLOE READ: No, I think—were you asking about PIDs?

The CHAIR: Yes.

JULIE TICKLE: So that's everything together. Before the break I said 48 reports were received and classified as PIDs and 29 additional were received but not classified as PIDs.

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CHLOE READ: That was in the last financial year, so that's as at the end of June.

JULIE TICKLE: Yes.

CHLOE READ: I would need to take on notice any update between then and now.

The CHAIR: Is internal information used to investigate employees under PIDs, as opposed to using standard performance management processes?

JULIE TICKLE: We use a combination of things to investigate the matters. Obviously internal information, where it's required, is used. We do have a performance management framework, and we use that as well. I'm not sure if that's the question you're asking.

The CHAIR: I think that is helpful. When we were talking before about how the decision gets made as to whether to do a standard performance management process or to use a PID, your evidence was there's a team or group of people who make that decision. I understand there are certain types of investigations that can fall within PID. But if something could be dealt with either by PID or a standard performance management process, is there discretion to not use a PID?

CHLOE READ: I don't think so.

JULIE TICKLE: No. If it falls within the parameters of a PID, it's a PID.

CHLOE READ: The Ombudsman's guidelines are clear on the types of activity, so if it falls within the definition of a PID, it needs to be treated as one.

The CHAIR: I'll move on. I want to look at the NSW Higher Education Strategy 2025-29. Do you have any more details around that strategy? What budget has been allocated? Who in the department is accountable for different outcome streams? Is there any other information you can give me about that strategy?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's a strategy that we did partner with the universities here in New South Wales for 2025-29 and we worked with them to identify priority areas of focus. Mr Kurucz might talk to how we're monitoring that work.

JEREMY KURUCZ: We're working with each university at the moment in New South Wales on an implementation plan about relevant activities that they're going to contribute to the strategy. We're going to be releasing that by the end of the year, as well, so there's shared clarity about everyone's contribution to delivering that strategy over the next couple of years.

The CHAIR: How long did it take for that strategy to be developed? What was the process?

JEREMY KURUCZ: I think it was around 12 months where we worked with the universities to say, "How do we want to come together?" Then we've been working with them in the last eight months to be tangible about the particular things that we want to drive through that strategy. An example of that is one of the directions in there around establishing consistent credit transfer requirements or a consistent transfer policy across the sector. We're now working with them to say, "These are particular industries of focus. Which do we want to do collectively across the State versus where do we want to do some with a smaller number of universities where they've got a greater proportion of relevant course delivery?" That's what we're doing with the university sector at the moment.

The CHAIR: What's the reporting structure for the strategy? Are there milestones or yearly reporting? What sort of data will be collected?

JEREMY KURUCZ: We'll be doing yearly reports. We'll be meeting with the universities at least quarterly on the implementation of it, as the strategy itself. We're working with them far more regularly on the individual components of the strategy, but at least a yearly public report of our progress on that.

The CHAIR: Given the current cuts in eight out of the 10 public universities that's been flagged already today, was that considered as part of the development of the strategy and how might that impact on the success of the strategy?

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Kurucz might add to that. I think the Minister covered that this morning around what parameters the Minister has and how it's a decision for the university and its council. It's fair to say that this work was done prior to what that looked like. This is a strategy to try to support current and future New South Wales skills workforce needs. In those discussions, if that goes to priority areas, those discussions will be had. This goes to greater harmonisation between the tertiary and higher education sectors and the VET sector and the TAFE operation here in New South Wales as well. I know Ms Read has had discussions with universities as well. It goes to improving equity outcomes for higher education. It goes to enabling shared use—better use of facilities,

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assets and expertise—for the public good. They're wonderful high priority principles. The implementation plan will then dive down into the actions and how we measure those actions as well.

The CHAIR: Can we just go back to this question around energy? How many current electrical teachers are on temporary or casual contracts rather than permanent?

MURAT DIZDAR: In TAFE?

The CHAIR: Yes.

CHLOE READ: I think I took the full number of teachers on notice. I'll take how many of them are on temporary or casual contracts, noting that when we were talking earlier about the process to convert from casual to permanent contracts, that is an employee choice. There may be a bunch of people who are on casual or temporary contracts who wish to be so.

The CHAIR: This is in relation to the electrical apprentices. I asked you before for those who were waiting six months or 12 months or longer. Can you add into that also any kind of data that you hold in relation to average wait times for regional versus metro students as well?

CHLOE READ: Yes, we'll get whatever we have for you on that, again noting that the delivery profile might mean it is hard to determine which a student might be.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: There was a report back in September 2023 about a director of cybersecurity to support the Chief Information Security Officer for TAFE. Was that a position that was recruited, that you're aware of?

CHLOE READ: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is that an ongoing role or was that a one-off?

CHLOE READ: It's an ongoing role.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What is the specific role? There's a chief information security officer, and there is also a director in that role to consult—or am I completely wrong, which I could be?

CHLOE READ: I might get Ms Rankin to talk about what we have.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Ms Rankin, how about you talk me through how you deal with cybersecurity and IT issues? Maybe we'll just start that again.

FIONA RANKIN: My role is the chief information officer, and I have a director of information security officer who heads up all my cybersecurity areas. That's two areas that's split into—I think you might be referring to a role that reports to him which heads up the cybersecurity operations side of our cybersecurity, business to business.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'm just trying to understand—obviously you're the—

FIONA RANKIN: There's an operations manager that reports to him, to the CISO, if that makes sense.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, that does. Then in terms of overall responsibility for cyber- and data security, is that with you or with the person in that director role?

FIONA RANKIN: It's with me, but he's quite clearly my primary delegate and works closely with the executive team. He briefs the executive team. He briefs the audit and risk committee. He briefs me as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: What's that individual's name, if you don't mind?

FIONA RANKIN: Rohan Heyer.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Then in terms of more broadly any concerns around data risks and current challenges in that space, is there anything that is—

FIONA RANKIN: Data risk is our highest rate of cybersecurity risk, the highest risk within the organisation. It's a constant concern. It's a constantly evolving operation. However, having said that—and I touch wood as I say this—we have not had any reportable breaches in the last two years.

CHLOE READ: Also, certainly since I've been at TAFE, we've undergone—this is going to get a bit technical. There's a standard that relates to information security management and how you manage those things in your organisation. It's called the ISO 27001—only those of us who used to work in tech know what that means. We needed to undergo certification against the new standard, which is 20022. We just did that within 2025 and achieved that certification. Why that's important is because the previous standard was several years before that,

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and obviously the space of cyber and data and data security has changed a lot in that time. So it's really reassuring for us to have that certification, and that's done via an external audit process. They come and have a look at all the things that you do and make sure that you're doing the right things. Then we have a cybersecurity policy that we're working through the implementation of in line with the whole-of-government direction on cybersecurity and data privacy.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In terms of the SAP platform, there is an investment to look to do some transitioning on that particular portal that I think was reported on. Can you provide any updates on that? I'm happy whether it's Ms Read or Ms Rankin.

CHLOE READ: I'll have a crack and then Ms Rankin can tell me where I've missed something.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I probably won't know if you don't cover it all, to be honest.

CHLOE READ: The SAP system, which is part of the architecture that manages things to do with employees and payroll—TAFE's instance of that is relatively old and on-premise. What we're doing is upgrading to the later version, but also moving that into a managed environment in the cloud. It's essentially the modern version of how you run those systems. So we've got funding to do that, and the project is underway.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Did you want to add anything, Ms Rankin?

FIONA RANKIN: SAP represents our enterprise resource planning system. Essentially it manages, largely, the HR piece, payroll and our financial side of business, so it's pretty core to the corporate business.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In addition to that, is there some new work with your software licences through Microsoft and the cloud as well? Is that happening in tandem with that work, or is that one and the same?

FIONA RANKIN: Part of the contract negotiations with SAP was that there's a cloud-based version of that. That went out, and Microsoft were awarded that business.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Is there a total figure on what the spend is on all of that work that we've talked about? If you need to take it on notice, that's fine.

CHLOE READ: Yes, let's take that on notice, because I suspect we've got some bits and not others.

FIONA RANKIN: And a figure was misreported to news at the time. We have had that corrected.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be good if you want to provide that on notice.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could look at adult and community education, I understand that in 2024 the New South Wales Government released the adult and community education sector strategy 2024-28. What are the current year priority projects under that strategy?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Merton, my colleagues will add to this. You're spot-on. It was launched in September 2024, and we're chasing three areas in that strategy: strengthening the ACE educational workforce, enhancing learner pathways and improving access to training. It's a really important program. My colleagues might have other detail they can give you.

JEREMY KURUCZ: Yes, thanks very much, Secretary. Alongside the ACE Strategy, Ms Merton, just as we have this conversation, it's really important that we've also secured around \$22 million of extra funding from the Commonwealth Government to boost the adult and community education sector in New South Wales. So through both the ACE Strategy and the National Skills Agreement funding, we're doing a number of things. One of the most important things that links to the strategy and the National Skills Agreement funding is the expansion of our existing outreach support officer initiative. This is essentially expanding on outreach support staff who are engaged to go out and improve training and access for people who need adult and community education training. One of the problems that we have in New South Wales is actually getting people who need literacy and numeracy support into adult and community education in the first place to undertake that training. Those roles have been really vital across the State to get people to their local Aboriginal and community education training providers to actually boost their literacy and numeracy skills.

The new round of that program commenced on 1 July this year and it includes around 43 staff—nine full-time and 34 part-time staff across the country. We're also then working with the sector in relation to things such as additional workforce supports—so how do we upskill the existing adult and community education workforce so that they can deliver more relevant and more specialist and targeted training to support increases in literacy and numeracy? The other thing that we've done is we've also expanded funding as a result of our partnership with the Commonwealth Government so that more students are eligible to undertake adult and community education foundational courses.

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The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of next year's priority projects, have they been identified?

JEREMY KURUCZ: I'd have to take that on notice. I don't have that information in front of me at the moment.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Given the strategy has been in place for 12 months, has the department published any outcomes of the strategy or how you might measure the results of such a strategy?

MURAT DIZDAR: Mr Kurucz might add to this. I can tell you that for the 2024-25 half-yearly report, pleasingly, those ACE providers delivered training to 11,636 participants, resulting in 28,296 training delivery units. Something that the Committee might be interested in is the fact that two-thirds of those ACE providers provide this outside Greater Sydney, which is wonderful because it's a vast and diverse State and you want to be able to lift the training profiles across the State.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could look at New South Wales fee-free part qualifications, which I understand are short courses often referred to as "microcredentials", how many New South Wales fee-free part qualifications were completed in financial year 2024-25?

JEREMY KURUCZ: I will see if I've got that information for you, Ms Merton. Otherwise, we will take it on notice. I don't have the breakdown in front of me specifically around fee-free part qualifications. We might have to take that one on notice.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: For my information, could you define for me the "part qualification"?

JEREMY KURUCZ: Ms Lawrence might be able to provide further detail to you on this. Essentially, a full qualification is made up of a number of units of competency. It might be, though, that in certain circumstances, an individual's or employer's preference is to just have a certain number of those units of competency delivered to them. When you're only delivering a small subset of a fuller qualification, that's what we reference as a part qualification. It might be things like—we have an excellent program called AgSkilled, which is supporting the agricultural industry throughout New South Wales. They might be coming in and engaging with us in a part qualification program in relation to, for instance, the safe management of chemicals on a farm. That will essentially be a part qualification program because it involves one or two units of competency, so it's not the full qualification.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Hence the reference to "micro".

JEREMY KURUCZ: Yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the 11 courses covered under the fee-free part qualification, do we know what those areas would include?

JEREMY KURUCZ: I don't have that information in front of me. Ms Lawrence, do you have that—

AMANDA LAWRENCE: No, I would need to take that on notice, but we can provide that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Thank you. It has been put to me from the community that mining and manufacturing doesn't fit or is not offered under that part qualification.

JEREMY KURUCZ: There are a couple of things. It may be that those qualifications are more suited to full qualifications, so we don't necessarily target the funding to part qualification programs because it's more suitable for industry for someone to have a full qualification in that particular occupation. We really encourage local industry to engage with the local training services' offices in a regional area, who can develop, when there's funding available, relevant part qualification training packages and opportunities for local people and local industries. We don't necessarily have across-the-State rules, though, but I can defer to Ms Read, who might be able to provide some information about what TAFE does.

CHLOE READ: I was just going to say that under the partnership with the Commonwealth and the manufacturing centres of excellence, there are some microskills for enrolment under those manufacturing centres of excellence. There are things about renewable manufacturing careers, advanced manufacturing careers and maths foundations for manufacturing. We know that maybe people are already working in the industry who need some maths uplift. Then there are things like generative design and analysis. That's where you're designing tools using a virtual environment and testing those tools before you then manufacture them. Also, we have a range of courses planned to deliver virtually and face to face across the next couple of years. There's some manufacturing content there, I think.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could look at NSW Skills for Net Zero, I understand it was announced in July 2025. Would you be able to elaborate a little bit more about what is NSW Skills for Net Zero?

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JEREMY KURUCZ: Ms Merton, I'm not sure of the specific report you're referring to. We're out to consultation at the moment with the sector about a renewable energy skills plan in New South Wales. There was a report released yesterday by the national jobs and skills council for the renewable energy sector that talked about national and State-by-State demand for regional energy skills. I'm not sure of the specific report you're referencing.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'll detail it a little bit more. It's in reference to a \$1 million program, with an announced three-year pilot, which I understand will pair 100 tertiary students with businesses in New South Wales to undertake paid work on projects setting out to reduce emissions. Does that make sense?

JEREMY KURUCZ: It does. It's not one within our agency, unfortunately, Ms Merton. We can take that on notice and see if we can get other relevant information through to you, but that's not one where we're involved.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: That's okay. I couldn't work out where it fitted.

MURAT DIZDAR: We'll work out where it's fitted.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: On the budget announcements specifically around the construction workforce package, one of the commitments in the budget was funding an additional 23,000 construction apprenticeships and access to free training for jobs like plumbing, carpentry and electrotechnology. Has that investment started to roll out in terms of taking on new apprentices, if it's funding additional roles?

JEREMY KURUCZ: There were two components of the budget announcement that related to construction. The first was the continuation of the existing fee-free apprenticeship and traineeship program for the next two years. The other component was in relation to some specific measures for the construction workforce. That was a \$13.8 million package. I believe you may have been referring to the apprenticeship and traineeship announcement, potentially.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, that was \$40.2 million.

JEREMY KURUCZ: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In other words, they're the fee-free options that have been happening for a while. It's continuing those for two years.

JEREMY KURUCZ: Yes, continuing.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And you anticipate that will have another 23,000 construction—that's based on those figures.

JEREMY KURUCZ: Correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, I'm happy for you to take it on notice, but do you have the overall figures at the moment for people who are undertaking apprenticeships, particularly in those trades around plumbing, carpentry and electrotechnology?

JEREMY KURUCZ: I will check. Ms Lawrence will be able to provide you with that information.

AMANDA LAWRENCE: Yes, I have that. As at 24 July this year, there are approximately 58,000 apprentices and trainees currently in training in the construction skills area, with more than 18,000 training contracts approved so far this year.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Of that 58,000, do you have a breakdown of which areas—so plumbing versus electric versus carpentry?

AMANDA LAWRENCE: All of those qualifications are in there. I can get you a breakdown.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be good. I'm curious to how that's all tracking. Also, as part of that package, there was \$2 million for school career fairs and industry partnerships. I think they talked about the tiny homes and Girls Can Too. There were a few different options in there. I think it was 3,000 school students. Where will that be available? Where will those fairs be running? What will that look like?

JEREMY KURUCZ: That's correct. We're happy to take the details on notice on particular schools and some details of the particular industry fairs that are coming up. We're off and running with that already. There is a tiny home project at a school in the North Coast. Students last year participated in a process where they built a tiny home as part of their high school offering and sold that. The school made some money off that and was able to reinvest into continuing that project again. We're going to be expanding that to further parts of the country.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Which school was that, do you know?

JEREMY KURUCZ: I'm not sure what school that was.

CORRECTED

MURAT DIZDAR: We should visit.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I was going to say, Murat—sorry, Mr Dizdar, do you know?

MURAT DIZDAR: It just got my attention. We should be building homes in every high school.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Yes, it sounds really good.

CHLOE READ: I would love a tiny house. I might buy it.

JEREMY KURUCZ: It's a really great initiative. We're doing that in other parts of the State as a result of this package as well. We'll get you further details on notice about that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Obviously that's a regional example. So you'll be doing some metro and some regional as well?

JEREMY KURUCZ: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: The Girls Can Too, I'm assuming, is about trying to get female participation into those constructions trades.

JEREMY KURUCZ: Yes, into the construction industry. That's correct—high school students, correct.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Do you have with you, Ms Lawrence, a breakdown of the 58,000 that you gave in terms of male versus female participant?

AMANDA LAWRENCE: No, I don't have that, but I can get that.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That'd be great.

MURAT DIZDAR: It's Lismore High School, Ms Mitchell.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Fabulous. It's a wonderful school.

MURAT DIZDAR: If you're interested, we'll take you for a visit.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I'd like to do that. Sounds good. We talked about this a little bit earlier with the Minister in terms of course offerings, particularly in the New England North West area. One other thing that gets raised with me a little bit is access to hospitality training up in that area, particularly some of the certificate courses. Is there any data in terms of what's available in the New England North West, specifically for hospitality?

CHLOE READ: There will be. I don't have that with me. I think you heard Mr Hawkins say earlier that sometimes we offer things and don't get a lot of demand, and I know in a couple of areas, where we've had things raised with us, we've had offerings available and we've had no takers. Do you want a specific region, did you say, sorry?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That request came from Armidale. But I'm interested in the New England North West, what offerings there are for those hospitality courses.

CHLOE READ: Why don't we take that on notice and come back with that?

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: That would be fantastic.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of the apprenticeship numbers that were provided there and the number of training contracts in place, I'm just interested in looking at what the completion rates may be. What do we know, possibly over the last maybe 12 months and the earlier 12 months, about how we are tracking on completion of these apprenticeships in key construction areas relevant to the housing demand?

JEREMY KURUCZ: I'll defer to Ms Lawrence, if she has any specific information about the construction sector. What I can say is we had an increase of about 4 per cent in terms of apprenticeship completions in 2024, compared to 2023. We are seeing early evidence of increased retention rates through the VET system, which is really pleasing at the moment. Hopefully, in coming years, we'll see a subsequent increase in completion rates. I'll just ask Ms Lawrence if she has any further information she can provide on completions.

AMANDA LAWRENCE: Just expanding on those numbers I provided before about in training, we've had more than 9,000 apprentices and trainees in the construction skills areas complete their training so far this year. I don't have a breakdown for past years, but I can let you know the highest numbers of apprentice completions and the qualifications. They were in between 2021 and 2024, and they were the cert III in carpentry, electrotechnology, plumbing, air conditioning and refrigeration, and roof plumbing.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In terms of a percentage, if you could just put that back to me, what completion rates do we have?

CORRECTED

AMANDA LAWRENCE: I'll take it on notice so I don't have to do the maths here. But it's 9,000 so far this year.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Sorry, 9,000 have completed?

AMANDA LAWRENCE: That's correct.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: How many enrolled?

AMANDA LAWRENCE: We've got 58,000 apprentices and trainees in training this year.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Currently enrolled?

AMANDA LAWRENCE: That's right, currently enrolled.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: From memory—and please correct me—I thought we were looking at completion rates of about 50 per cent, which was one in two enrolled students would complete that area of study. Does that still remain the case?

AMANDA LAWRENCE: I think our completion rates in New South Wales are slightly higher than that. I can find the correct figure for you.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Would anyone else want to elaborate on that?

MURAT DIZDAR: On the completion rates for apprentices and trainees overall?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Overall—I'm happy if that's what's available.

CHLOE READ: Can I offer a comment on apprenticeship completions. There's a complicated calculation about those because you have a period of time during which you can complete. So you can't look at completions in this year and numbers in training in this year, because the completion rate for this year is based on people who started six years ago.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Sure, I appreciate that.

CHLOE READ: That's just an observation on that. It's tricky.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: There's not a fixed commencement period.

JEREMY KURUCZ: I'm happy to provide you with the latest data that we have available, noting Ms Read's excellent qualify there. The most recent data we have available for us comes to us nationally, and that's from September 2024. That relates to people who completed in 2023. That showed us then that our most recent apprenticeship and traineeship completion rate was 56.4 per cent, which is above the national average. But, as Ms Read did articulate, then there are a number of reasons as to why we, essentially, have a lag in the data by the time that we actually are able to calculate that completion rate.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I appreciate it's not a clear-cut system on that. In terms of addressing retention, what are we doing on that?

JEREMY KURUCZ: I'm very happy to talk to this. We've got a range of programs in New South Wales already—you would have heard the Minister talk briefly to them before—things like scholarships, the Bert Evans Apprentice Scholarship. We have the Vocational Training Assistance Scheme that provides people with additional funding if they live regionally and they've got to travel—money for petrol and for accommodation. We're working at the moment with the Commonwealth Government in relation to some significant additional funding under the National Skills Agreement to focus more on completions. Some of that is about making sure that we have the right wraparound support for students as they continue throughout their training. Some of it is also making sure we're doing the right up-front diagnostic testing on things like literacy and numeracy. We make sure that students, particularly apprentices and young apprentices, get the literacy and numeracy support they need as soon as they start training as well. We are acknowledging that there is certainly more work to do. Ms Read might want to comment on some of the work that she has underway at TAFE NSW, from a support perspective.

CHLOE READ: Just on that pre-screening element of making sure people come to TAFE and understand where they're at with their education and what their preferences might be, we've launched a thing called Find Your Fit. On our website, you can basically use it to guide you through a process of understanding what level and types of qualification might be right for you. As of earlier this month, we'd had 27,323 individuals use that tool on our website to find their fit. Then there's a report that comes out of that that also lets us facilitate conversations with people. For example, they might identify that they need additional support through that process, but they also might decide that they want to enrol in a higher qualification than the Find Your Fit tool. Again, it lets us step in and say, "Great. What are we going to do to support you with that qualification? What else do you need?"—those

CORRECTED

kinds of things. I think that's going to be a really valuable addition in terms of completions, getting people to the right place early in their journey with us.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: In March, I think it was, we talked about the mobile training units. I think, again, the Minister spoke about that as well. In an answer that we got back on notice, the advice was that there were 91 mobile training units, but there are also new ones planned to support green energy as well, and then two others on order for the manufacturing centres of excellence, which I think the Minister might have spoken about. Can you tell me about the mobile training units for green energy?

CHLOE READ: I have lost my note on this. I wonder, Mr Hawkins, if you might help us with the specifics on that.

MARK HAWKINS: Ms Mitchell, I believe the ones you are talking about were under the Future Fund, which was as a result of some Commonwealth funding, in which we worked in partnership with the University of Wollongong to generate a number of mobile training units, under the premise of—one is around the attraction piece. I think we hear today about skills shortages and the need to attract people into the trades and renewable sector. One of those training units is actually both of them in the way of an EV truck, and they've been fitted out with particular engaging pieces of equipment that will go around and engage schools et cetera and school students in getting into the renewables sector. The other one has been fitted out in regard to providing micro skills or type training in renewables as well.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: Again, coming back to some of the answers that we got in March, in terms of the number of the utilisation rates of campuses, the answer back was there are 154 operational campuses being actively used, and there were nine non-operational sites that weren't currently in operation. Are those figures still the same now?

CHLOE READ: Yes, I believe so.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: You mentioned that those not in operation can be leased to other third parties for different or alternative uses.

CHLOE READ: Yes.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: And also in response to one of my questions you said that you were developing new leasing and licensing policies and procedures as well. Is there an update on that work from when we were here in March?

CHLOE READ: Yes. We've developed an approach that will standardise the licensing parameters so that people who want to approach us and say, "Could I lease a space of your campus?", will be clear on it. Because we used to have regions and different management and stuff over it, I think we have very different arrangements in place across the State. And then the other part of that is the Minister talked a bit about how coming out of the contestable market lets us partner differently, and I think, Ms Merton, you referred to partnering with other organisations, ACE sector, all of those things, other government agencies and that kind of thing. We're developing a policy that particularly would let us partner with those community organisations. We just need to progress through government approvals on that because one of the things we'd like to do is move away from always having to charge market rent to a community organisation, and so we're looking for an approach that would let us apply an exemption to that more systemically.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: So trying to standardise that approach particularly for a community-based provider, for instance, who might want to come in.

CHLOE READ: Yes, that's right. Whereas at the moment we have people on various different arrangements and it's not always clear to people what they can engage with TAFE to do.

The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I appreciate that needs to go through the levels of government, but once that has been finalised is that something that will be publicly facing so that people could understand this is how it's now going to work?

CHLOE READ: Definitely.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I might just go back to a couple of issues that I raised earlier in the morning with the Minister. Ms Read, you mentioned that you're working on a business case for a permanent location for Bankstown TAFE. Where is that up to? What stage of the business case are we at?

CHLOE READ: It's in development.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What does that mean to the layperson?

CORRECTED

CHLOE READ: It means we have to do a whole lot of work to say, "What are all the options that are available to us?", and then we have to go and do as much as we can to do things like cost those options and define the benefits of them.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Has anyone actually gone onsite to look at options?

CHLOE READ: What do you mean "onsite"?

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Has there been a visit to Bankstown? The Minister said it was going to be in the Bankstown town centre. Earlier today he said the permanent location would be within Bankstown town centre. Those were his words.

CHLOE READ: Yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Have there been people within your staff who have already gone out onsite into the town centre to have a look?

CHLOE READ: I'd have to take on notice the degree of site visits and things. Obviously if you're looking at different places and different approaches, you have to look at what's available to you as well. You would have to say, "What would the cost to build on this site be versus that site versus to lease this place or that place?"

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How many staff would you say you have on this project right now working on it?

CHLOE READ: I'd have to take that on notice because the team aren't likely just to be working on the business case for this; they're likely to be the team that works across a whole range of work to do with the planning of our assets and those kinds of things.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: When do you envisage the business case to be finalised?

CHLOE READ: I'm hoping this year, but I'm going to confirm that on notice. I just want to check in with the team.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Will you take that on notice and confirm it by notice?

CHLOE READ: Yes, definitely.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Just back on the \$25 million lease bonanza for UWS, when was that arrangement with Western Sydney University finalised?

CHLOE READ: We signed the lease on 6 June.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: When will you go onsite? I assume the fit-out has to start soon.

CHLOE READ: The fit-out has started.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: It has already started?

CHLOE READ: Yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Has this lease already come into effect then?

CHLOE READ: No. We have an access period before the lease comes into effect to do the fit-out.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: When did the access period start?

CHLOE READ: I'll take that on notice. I was there on Monday and there were people onsite starting to do the stuff.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You mentioned you did a visit on Monday. Was that your first visit, Ms Read?

CHLOE READ: It was my first visit to the WSU tower but not to the existing Bankstown campus.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I understand that, but it was your first visit to the tower. I understood the Minister hasn't been to the tower.

CHLOE READ: I think that's what he said earlier.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I thought so—in a roundabout way. He avoided saying it.

CHLOE READ: But we can correct that on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: The access period has already started. When will the lease then begin?

CORRECTED

CHLOE READ: I'm going to take that on notice because I don't think I have that date in front of me.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: If you can take it on notice, I'd like to know exactly the date. I will be putting that same question to the professor this afternoon. They may be in a position where they might know that.

CHLOE READ: Yes. I just don't have it with me. I'm sure that we know it. I just don't have it in my head or on the page in front of me.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: If you could take that on notice, that'd be great. Are you expecting all 5,000 students—there's 5,500 I think. The last data revealed that that's how many were enrolled at Bankstown. This morning you provided me a slightly different figure from what I got from the budget estimates in February. There's been an update. It's now 5,000. Is that right?

CHLOE READ: It's about 5,000, yes. It's 2024 I think rather than 2023.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That's right. I think the figure was slightly higher than I received at the last budget estimates. That's fine. Are you expecting that these students will all be onsite or will there be a combination of online students coming on next year?

CHLOE READ: There'd be a combination.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What is the current combination? Do you know?

CHLOE READ: I don't, but I can take that on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Could you take that on notice?

CHLOE READ: Yes, of course.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'd like to know how many students currently go onsite and how many actually undertake their courses—

CHLOE READ: I'll just flag there'll be a few where we may not know because they'll have the option to do either. We'll give you what we can.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That's what I was going to say—whatever data that TAFE might have in relation to how many students take the option up of being online, or perhaps it was partially online. I'm interested because I'd like to know how many people will be expected to be at the UWS. You have a university also that has students and at the same time you're going to have TAFE students. As I understand it, UWS always said they'd have 10,000 students, but the last information I received from the professor was that it was only currently, I think, 3,000 enrolled.

CHLOE READ: That's good news in terms of the building.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm anticipating that it will be higher. And then, again, I also put to the professor: What was the combination of online and not online?

CHLOE READ: Yes, okay. The other thing I'll say on that—obviously we'll get it on notice—is, as the Minister referenced, we are moving some things to Padstow as well and then we're introducing nursing once we've done that ANMAC certification.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You're saying some will come over, but how many realistically out of that 5,000? I didn't think it would be that much.

CHLOE READ: Animal studies is relatively small but early childhood I think is larger.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can you take on notice how many you anticipate will go over to Padstow? Padstow has a much smaller number of enrolments.

CHLOE READ: Yes. What we'll do is give you the breakdown of who's enrolled and what we know about online versus blended versus face-to-face only delivery. I'll see what we can get.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Have any of your staff had a good discussion on how you're going to do this sort of—I'm not sure how many other examples we have in New South Wales where you actually have a TAFE campus in the same vicinity as a university campus. Do we have other examples?

CHLOE READ: We have a few, yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: In the Sydney Basin or is that perhaps somewhere else?

CHLOE READ: No. In Coffs Harbour we're on the same site as schools and a university. Ourimbah we have University of Newcastle and TAFE.

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes, they're country regional sites. Have they got the same student numbers in the thousands?

CHLOE READ: I'd have to check that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You can give me the comparison on what the student numbers are there in comparison to—

CHLOE READ: Yes, and then Nirimba we also have until recently.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: This is a major Sydney university. It's about 19 kilometres from the CBD, and it's a very significant TAFE, I would've thought—Bankstown, the campus itself.

CHLOE READ: We'll have a look at Nirimba as well because that's obviously in Sydney. Although, arrangements there are changing.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Sorry, which?

CHLOE READ: Nirimba.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Where's that?

MURAT DIZDAR: Western Sydney.

CHLOE READ: It's near Seven Hills and that area.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What's the university there? Is it a different campus?

CHLOE READ: Up until recently it's Western Sydney, so we'll have a look at what the numbers were on that site.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Is that also in a tower?

CHLOE READ: No, it's different.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: It's a spread out, geographically larger campus.

MURAT DIZDAR: May I just add one thing? I'm not sure if you were in the room when we were talking about the higher ed strategy. One of the key aims there that the nation's really wrestling with is tertiary harmonisation. How do you make seamless movement from the skills TAFE side to university? I think this co-location will give us the added advantage of trying to break the back of that. It hasn't been universally done across the country, exposing our TAFE students to university options, university to TAFE.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I accept that, Mr Dizdar. I think earlier we talked about it, but the Minister confirmed, as did Ms Read, that the subjects and courses that the TAFE is doing, particularly, for example, in health—and I think I confirmed that, actually, via the professor advising me in the supplementary questions earlier in the year that they don't have any health courses at Bankstown campus. So I suppose that will work only if there's a real overlap in courses. Right?

CHLOE READ: Yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What you're talking about—that transition—only works if you're actually offering the similar type of qualifications and skills. But if Bankstown campus, as in the university, decides not to offer any health-related courses, then the work that you're doing in putting nursing in there—there will be no provision for those students to move into university, certainly not at that same campus.

MURAT DIZDAR: I think it's a fair point, but I'd also just add it's not course diagnostic. You'd want some of these qualifications leading to tertiary pathways—that's not the only campus or university that's available for that—and vice versa, for the university student to see what technical opportunities are also available. I think it grows that opportunity in an area where the country has struggled, around harmonisation.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I don't think anyone's opposed to the idea of how this could work. I think it's that we're just trying to get down to—for me, it's the concern about whether this is value for money for a taxpayer in New South Wales and, certainly, the ratepayers, but that's another issue. It's not one really for you.

CHLOE READ: Just on that pathway piece, I do think it applies. We run finance, business, IT, those kinds of things, in Bankstown too. Also having things like the AMEP there, the Adult Migrant English Program—there is something about people who undertake training, building their confidence to take higher levels. We see that a lot in early childhood as well. So I do think there are pathways to be explored there in those other subjects. I take your point on health. Obviously, if they don't offer it, then we can't articulate together. But there's a broader range of delivery there.

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I think the university did say what courses they were. I wasn't even sure if there was anything in early childhood either, to be honest, but I'd have to have a look. No, it does have some programs for education.

The CHAIR: How many workers compensation claims have been lodged by TAFE NSW staff in the past five years? Are you able to tell me that broken down by physical versus psychological injury?

CHLOE READ: As you can imagine, I'm going to look towards Ms Tickle to see if she has that information here with her.

JULIE TICKLE: I don't have in the last five years, but I can tell you currently there are just over 400 open workers compensation claims. Forty-three per cent of those are psychological, and 57 per cent are physical claims. But I don't have the last five years.

The CHAIR: Take that bit on notice?

JULIE TICKLE: Sure.

The CHAIR: Are you able to tell me the average cost per workers compensation claim at TAFE NSW?

JULIE TICKLE: I'll just have a look if I have that. No, I don't. I'd be happy to provide what we can on notice. We would have that. I just don't have it in front of me.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Does TAFE have a policy regarding the use of investigations when claims come through, particularly when it comes to psychological injuries?

JULIE TICKLE: For workers compensation claims? We don't have a specific policy to do with workers compensation claims. We have guidelines and a framework around investigations in general. But workers compensation claims—can you give me an example of what you mean?

The CHAIR: Yes. We found that, across different departments and different agencies within New South Wales government, there's a different approach to the use of investigations. For instance, Health has a much higher level of investigation of psychological claims than Education does. Also, some agencies use a lot more surveillance. So I guess it's the degree to which scepticism is applied to the claim as it's coming through. There are a couple of different aspects to this: It's the steps that are taken by the agency prior to accepting the claim and when it's going to actually dispute the claim, and then also what kind of measures it might employ in order to investigate. That changes, agency by agency. I'm wondering if TAFE has a particular policy that it can share with us.

JULIE TICKLE: Not that I'm aware of, but I'd be happy to take that on notice and double-check. What we concentrate on at TAFE is return to work. We have injury case management specialists, and we've added some more to the team that sits in my portfolio, to support people who are off work. Workers compensation claims can be provisionally accepted by the insurer, and then they are actually accepted by the insurer. So we work with the employee, their line manager and, obviously, with the insurer through that whole process.

The CHAIR: Do you mind taking on notice just to have a look if there's any other bits of policy document or other things that can help inform what the approach is?

JULIE TICKLE: Yes, certainly, I can.

CHLOE READ: I think also the work health and safety improvement plan might be a useful document. The other thing—obviously, return to work is very important—is early intervention and proactive kind of management at the front end so that you don't end up in as severe cases or you don't have as long time spent away from the workplace. All of those proactive things about establishing a culture of wellbeing are really important for TAFE and something that we want to put more emphasis on into the future.

JULIE TICKLE: I would like to just take a few seconds to comment on our wellbeing plan, which is actually a finalist in the Australian HR Awards. We have a really comprehensive wellbeing plan. For the fourth year in a row, we will run an R U OK? Day two-day session where employees can attend wellbeing sessions that are delivered by our teachers and some professionals across the State, and we have a number of other wellbeing initiatives, including—every Wednesday, we have a Wellbeing Wednesday session.

The CHAIR: Has SafeWork NSW, SIRA or icare ever raised compliance concerns with TAFE NSW's management of workers compensation obligations?

JULIE TICKLE: No. We haven't had any noncompliance with reporting obligations within the last three years, number of years.

The CHAIR: Has TAFE NSW undertaken any independent reviews of psychosocial risks in its campuses?

CORRECTED

JULIE TICKLE: The psychosocial hazards legislation, which changed and identified, I think off the top of my head, 16 specific hazards to do with psychosocial—we've done quite a lot of risk assessment and review to really streamline the areas of concentration that we have at TAFE, and we worked across the business, looking at things like data from our PMES results, for example, claims and anecdotal information to narrow down where we were going to concentrate. That's been woven into that plan that I was just talking about. So we have done risk assessments, absolutely.

The CHAIR: What's the average time lost per workers compensation claim for TAFE NSW's staff?

JULIE TICKLE: I think, Ms Boyd, I will have to take that on notice and provide it back to you.

The CHAIR: How often does the TAFE NSW board or the audit and risk committee receive reports on workers compensation performance and risks?

JULIE TICKLE: We report to the audit and risk committee every quarter, I think it is, on work health and safety more broadly, which includes workers compensation, injury rates, use of EAP, all that sort of thing. So we do very comprehensive reporting. The executive leadership team receives the reports once a month. I'm not quite sure on the board.

CHLOE READ: I don't know off the top. We can take that on notice.

The CHAIR: What audits or reviews of TAFE NSW's workers compensation management have been conducted in the past three years?

JULIE TICKLE: We engaged Ernst and Young to conduct an independent internal review of workers compensation and return to work processes last year, in the FY '25 year. That review included assessment against the criteria of the SIRA assurance claims management audit guide and their audit tool, which referenced the statutory obligations that TAFE and all organisations have.

The CHAIR: What's the recent trend in claim frequency within TAFE NSW?

JULIE TICKLE: The serious claims frequency rate is what we measure. There has been a decrease in the serious claims frequency rate in the last financial year. But you actually asked specifically about workers comp, and I thought that was here.

The CHAIR: You can take that on notice.

JULIE TICKLE: I'm really sorry. If it's here, I'll come back to you, but I just can't find it right this minute.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm going to jump in with three quick questions. Back to Ms Read in regard to the location for a permanent site for Bankstown TAFE, will that be limited to just government or Crown-owned land?

CHLOE READ: No, it's the process to develop a business case that we talked about before. You have to assess all the available options so, no, we wouldn't just limit it to that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You haven't got a direction from the Minister saying that, at this stage, it should only be looking at government-owned or Crown land? It's open to all land?

CHLOE READ: Unless there's a Government decision to do so, then Treasury would expect us to do a broad assessment.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How far is the town centre? Do you have a map of what you constitute as the town centre of Bankstown? I know they were the words the Minister used, but is it the whole suburb of Bankstown?

CHLOE READ: Let me take that on notice because there will be some ABS definition.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Will the Bankstown Senior College site be one of the sites that TAFE will look into as a possibility?

CHLOE READ: Let me take that on notice and I'll come back to you.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Just quickly about parking, in the response that you gave me in the supplementary at the last budget estimates, there were 460 bays available at the current TAFE site. You said that you're going to have an arrangement where you'll lease back or you'll have some of that site for the new TAFE. How many bays will there be?

CHLOE READ: That's a short-term piece. If I can break it down, there are 60 at the WSU tower. I think, as the Minister indicated, we will need to carefully make sure that people who—

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Is that for staff or will that be for students as well?

CHLOE READ: It's going to need to be for both because if we have students, for example, with a disability who need a parking space, then—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: What about without a disability—beyond the disability space?

CHLOE READ: I'm just breaking it down for you. There are 60 at the WSU tower. As the Minister mentioned, for a shortish period we will potentially have some access to parking on the existing site, but we've also done some analysis—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Ms Read, could you let me know how long that will be for, and what "shortish" means?

CHLOE READ: It's the first half of next year. As I said, at Lidcombe campus we've got 560 parking spaces and a bus—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That's nowhere near Bankstown.

CHLOE READ: No, but we know that students come from a range of places, so it's almost like a park-and-ride concept where you could park there and then there is a bus that goes directly from Lidcombe campus to pretty much outside the WSU tower.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Have you caught that bus, Ms Read?

CHLOE READ: No, I haven't. The Padstow campus has 280 free spaces available. That's only about three kilometres, I think, away from Bankstown. Again—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Hang on, are you thinking people will park at Padstow and then catch a bus over to the CBD of Bankstown?

CHLOE READ: If they wish to, we will make that option available for students, is what I'm saying. There is also free parking in Bankstown CBD.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Where's the free parking in Bankstown?

CHLOE READ: I parked at Marion Street, and there's Bankstown Central.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Yes, Bankstown Central is the shopping centre. Have you let them know that you're going to have TAFE students at the shopping centre?

CHLOE READ: No, I'm just indicating—you raised parking last time, so we've done a scan of all the parking we have, all the parking in the area, and public transport, and the places where people might be able to park further out and catch a bus in.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Ms Read, you might not know this, but the Government is going to remove West Terrace car park, which is right next to the metro train station, which is a very significant car park. The only other free car park—well, you've said it—is Marion Street. There's also Brandon car park, but they're all absolutely full. You're not seriously going to direct TAFE students to use any of these facilities, are you?

CHLOE READ: No. As I said, though, what we are trying to do is understand where students might be coming from and what are the options for them—for example, to park at one of the other campuses and then catch public transport to Bankstown. That would significantly reduce, for someone coming—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Ms Read, have you had discussions with the traffic committee of Canterbury-Bankstown Council or their traffic engineers to raise any—

CHLOE READ: Let me take that on notice. I know we've met with council a couple of times this year, but I don't have detail on what we've talked to them about. I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Back on the permanent location, has the Minister provided you with an idea of how much budget there is for a new location? Obviously the amount that you've got now, this \$100 million, doesn't include a new location whatsoever, right?

CHLOE READ: No, that's right. The purpose of the business case would be to assess all the options, to determine what they are and the relative costs and relative benefits, and then you put that to Government as a means to secure that funding. You wouldn't get funding without it.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But we are not very far along in this development stage, are we, Ms Read?

CORRECTED

CHLOE READ: As I said, it is underway. I'm hoping it's going to be this year, but I was going to come back to you on notice on that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: With the lease arrangement, you were going to let me know when it was starting. Can you also let me know if you have an end date in that contractual arrangement or if there is an ongoing process so that it can be leased from month to month afterwards or some such arrangement?

CHLOE READ: I can let you know that the start date is 1 January 2026, pending, of course, proper handover and sign off of things. Then the lease is a three plus-one plus-one—so three years plus an extension of a year plus an extension of a year.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: At this stage it's not going to go over the \$25 million, or are there provisions that it could?

CHLOE READ: No. In fact, I think it will be less than that. But that's a commercial arrangement.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In the earlier discussion on the Bankstown TAFE, the Minister confirmed that the combined Bankstown hospital and TAFE NSW site is no longer going ahead.

CHLOE READ: I think the Minister said there hadn't been a decision on that.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I'm wondering, what is the duty to announce this to the community? The Minister put it to me that I should've joined the dots on this. What's the plan to let the community, the students and Bankstown TAFE know that they will no longer be part of the new hospital site?

CHLOE READ: As I think the Minister said earlier, no decision on that has been made. The process that we were just talking about with Ms Mihailuk is that process. We develop a business case, we canvass all the options, we do as much investigation and diligence on those options as we can, and we present that to government as a business case for decision. Then, obviously, it's up to the Government when they announce that decision.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Ms Read, you're saying that you believe the door is still open on Bankstown TAFE being reinstated, as per the original plan, on the new hospital site?

CHLOE READ: We haven't presented any options to government and had a decision on the final location for Bankstown TAFE.

MURAT DIZDAR: Can I just add that—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: There's a lot of confusion here.

MURAT DIZDAR: Yes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: People are asking questions—from the students, to the parents, to the high schools. You have a duty to let the community know. We know the business case; we know the jargon. What's the real story?

MURAT DIZDAR: It's not jargon. Work is underway to present options to government—that's called a business case process—around the permanent location. The announcement on 6 June, which is available publicly, indicates the hospital investment, which is a wonderful outcome for that area, and the TAFE infrastructure investment that Ms Read and the Minister spoke to by way of the relocation. Ms Read has covered that really well. Work is underway at pace to go back to government with the permanent location options for TAFE Bankstown.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: In that spirit, Mr Dizdar, are you saying that it still remains an option for the permanent relocation to be on the hospital site?

MURAT DIZDAR: Ms Read and the team will be working feverishly to put forward viable options to the Government.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I think you've got to be fair and honest with people here. It's not feasible. The door has closed on it. The Minister has indicated that.

MURAT DIZDAR: They'll look at all options.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The plans are no longer in place. The announcements, the terminology—the combined site is no longer being used.

MURAT DIZDAR: The end result—

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: The Minister even asked me in terms of the reference on the TAFE website.

CORRECTED

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Point of order: We have so little time. If we could keep it civil.

MURAT DIZDAR: The end result here is a fantastic outcome for Bankstown, with a major hospital and a TAFE that has permanent facilities. I visited that TAFE every day for four years. I actually worked on that site for four years.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How long ago was that?

MURAT DIZDAR: This will be a phenomenal outcome. There's a temporary outcome and Ms Read and the team will go in front of government to put forward the options for a permanent outcome. It's a fantastic project. Chair, can I add just one more detail? There was great questioning about the work on the tiny home at Lismore high school. I don't like to miss the opportunity of recognising good work in the public education system. I can tell the Committee that year 9 and 10 students at that school built this home and it was sold at auction—I'm told the bidding was feverish—for \$65,000, which they've reinvested. The next group of year 9 and 10 students are building the next tiny home.

The CHAIR: Fabulous. Thank you. We will be back at 3.45 p.m.

(Amanda Lawrence, Chloe Read, Kerryn Meredith-Sotiris, Julie Tickle, Mark Hawkins, Jason Darney, Fiona Rankin and Rebecca McPhee withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

Professor ANNAMARIE JAGOSE, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, University of Sydney, affirmed and examined

Professor G.Q. MAX LU, AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Wollongong, sworn and examined

Professor S. BRUCE DOWTON, Vice-Chancellor and President, Macquarie University, affirmed and examined

Professor VLADO PERKOVIC, Provost, University of New South Wales, sworn and examined

Mr DAVID CROSS, Chief of Staff, University of New South Wales, affirmed and examined

Professor ANDREW PARFITT, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Technology Sydney, sworn and examined

Distinguished Professor GEORGE WILLIAMS, AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, Western Sydney University, affirmed and examined

Professor TYRONE CARLIN, Vice-Chancellor and President, Southern Cross University, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: We now welcome our witnesses from the universities. Some of you are here for the second time before this Committee. Thank you very much for attending.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Sorry, Chair, just before we begin—in the interest of transparency, while it is a matter of public record, I did work at UTS; I was an elected staff representative on the board. And I was the New South Wales division president at the NTEU.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that declaration.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I might begin with Vice-Chancellor Williams. Professor, can I confirm what you've told me previously in writing that you currently pay \$1 peppercorn rent to Canterbury-Bankstown Council for the campus at Bankstown? Is that correct? You've put in writing that there's an arrangement that will remain the case if only 25 per cent or less of the building is—sorry, as long as the university is not occupied by more than 25 per cent of non-university related activities. Is that right?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: That's right. That 25 per cent figure is a threshold, yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: At this point in time, obviously we now know that you have secured an arrangement with the New South Wales Government for TAFE to, as I understand it, start their lease on 1 January 2026—

GEORGE WILLIAMS: Correct.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: —for a three by plus-one plus-one arrangement totalling \$25 million lease arrangement. Is that correct?

CORRECTED

GEORGE WILLIAMS: I can give you the full details. I know that the commencing gross rent is \$5.26 million. As to the full terms over that period, I'd take that on notice to make sure I get that correct.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: If you could take it on notice. I think both the Minister and Ms Read were quite clear that it was around the \$25 million mark.

GEORGE WILLIAMS: It could be.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: It may not be in the end, \$25 million, pending when they leave, but it's what's been allocated from the budget. When was that finally negotiated, Professor?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: I can't give you the exact date. I was not involved in those negotiations, so I'm sorry. I don't know the date.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: We were told that the lease arrangement was finalised on 6 June 2025. Were you not employed as the vice-chancellor?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: I was, but I was not the one conducting the negotiations. I had a team that was doing it. I just don't know the exact date.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: When did you become vice-chancellor for Western Sydney University?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: About 13 months ago.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: That was 13 months ago?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: Yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: And you had no role at all in any of these discussions?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: I certainly had a role. Under the delegations, I have a role where it exceeds a certain level. In fact, our board also has a role in these matters. But in terms of the question of when was the date when it happened, I was not in the room at that point, so I can't attest as to exactly what the date was.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You've got a note handed to you. When were you informed?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: Again, I'll take that on notice. I don't know the exact date.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You don't know when you were informed. That's a pretty big figure, a big lease arrangement for you. It's a great win, isn't it, for your university to secure a New South Wales government agency that's going to take 31.36 per cent of your floor space? Wouldn't that be something that you would take note of?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: I was certainly aware of it. I just don't know the exact date.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So you were aware of it. When were you aware that your staff were negotiating with TAFE?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: Again, I can't give you an exact date. It's gone over quite a long period of time, but I can't give you the exact date of—

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Can you give me a rough—last year, were you aware of this? Early this year?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: Again, I'll need to take that on notice to make sure I give you the right answer.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You'll take that on notice as to at what point you became aware that your staff were in direct negotiations with a New South Wales government agency, being TAFE, to secure 10½ thousand square metres of space for them in your vicinity. Professor, you now realise that reaches a 31.36 per cent threshold. Professor, you do appreciate where I'm heading with this. Is this now going to change the lease arrangements that you have with Canterbury-Bankstown Council?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: Not that I've been briefed, no. Again, I'm happy to look into that given the question.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You've told me previously—and these are your words, not mine—"Under the terms of the lease the university pays the council peppercorn rent, unless more than 25 per cent of the building is not occupied by the university or used for university purposes." I've just told you that if what the Minister has told me earlier today is correct, that percentage of what they're going to lease will amount to 31.36 per cent, which is over the 25 per cent threshold. Do you not accept that?

CORRECTED

GEORGE WILLIAMS: I think I'll need to take that on notice. It's not something I've been advised on, but I'm happy to look into that and give an answer.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Have you got anyone looking at the probity of what's going on at the university and the terms of—it doesn't seem to me that this would be difficult, to realise that you've now reached a particular threshold. Alarm bells should have rung by now that you're going to reach that threshold. You know what your terms of lease are—you've put it in writing—with Canterbury-Bankstown Council. Once you reach 25 per cent, those lease arrangements can't stand as they are. You can't continue to pay peppercorn rent to the ratepayers of Canterbury-Bankstown.

GEORGE WILLIAMS: And I'm very happy to give you the exact details. I just need to get proper advice on that. I'll give you an answer in writing to make sure we respond appropriately. Again, I'm not briefed on that here, so I'll need to take it on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You've been given a note. There's nothing in that note you want to read out to the Committee?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: I'm happy to say that the note indicates the 25 per cent threshold, but there's no indication we've exceeded that. That's why I'll need to get further advice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: How much floor space is there at the Bankstown campus? Can you confirm that for me? What's the floor space?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: I don't have that information with me. I'm happy to provide an answer on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You did provide it to me previously, which is where I'm getting the figure from. It's 33,482 square metres. You don't have that on you?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: No.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: You can't find that information?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: I don't have that on me, no.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Do you confirm that it's 10½ thousand square metres that TAFE is leasing off the university?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: Again, I don't have the exact figures. I'm very happy to give you precise answers, but I don't have all of that information before me in terms of that particular building, no.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Did you or anyone from your office listen to this morning's budget estimates hearing?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: I certainly didn't, no. I was at another event this morning.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: With all due respect, I thought you might prepare yourself for this. I'm surprised that you can't tell me what the floor space is at Bankstown campus.

GEORGE WILLIAMS: We have a large number of campuses. We have a lot of buildings. And you're absolutely right, from memory, I cannot tell you the floor space on that building.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I can only go by what you've provided to me previously. Obviously you have told me that it's 33,482 square metres. That's advice that you gave this Committee at the budget estimates in February—in the supplementary notes that you provided. Would we assume that's correct?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: I've just been advised by my staff that, yes, the building area is 33,482 square metres.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: I'm glad that you've been advised of that. So we now know—and it was confirmed today by the Minister—that they're leasing out 10,500 square metres. Perhaps one of your staff can do a quick calculation. But I've done it for you. That's 31.36 per cent. Do you accept that that is now a problem for you because it is over the threshold of 25 per cent?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: It's something I'll certainly get advice on. The reason I'll do that is, as you'd understand, these are based within a commercial contract. I'll need to check out what the 25 per cent measures and what it's a percentage of. They're not things I've been advised on at the moment. But certainly having heard your questions, yes, I will go and get advice on this.

CORRECTED

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: So at this point in time there's nobody within your staff that are looking into the possibility that you now have to adjust the lease arrangements between the university and Canterbury-Bankstown Council?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: If they are, I'm unaware of it. I'll check that.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Will you take it on notice if they are and at what stage of discussions they're at?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: Yes.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: My concern, of course, Professor, is that if that isn't happening, then perhaps you need some independent or external probity advice or assistance to ensure that you're complying with these lease arrangements. I'm surprised that no-one's looking into this.

GEORGE WILLIAMS: The other thing I can say, of course, is this arrangement comes into place on 1 January next year. So if there is a change that needs to be placed, there are some months for this to be realised. Again, I don't know—I have not been briefed on this—but if it's from 1 January, that's when a consequence would follow.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: But you're giving them access now, right? As I understand it, the TAFE confirmed they already have access now to do the fit-out.

GEORGE WILLIAMS: The lease actually begins on 1 January, and that would be the time at which that kicks in. But, again, I can take that on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: When do they start the fit-out, Professor? We were told there's a \$40 million fit-out of this freshly minted building in Bankstown.

GEORGE WILLIAMS: I don't know the exact date but, again, I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK: Do you know anything about the fit-out? You're not involved or have any information?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: No, I'm not involved in that.

The CHAIR: I think I'll start with Professor Carlin. You'll be aware of the reporting in relation to SCU's rapid diploma for early childhood educator education. Was the decision to create that rapid diploma approved by the SCU council, and were risks to academic quality and reputation fully considered?

TYRONE CARLIN: I'm not sure that we offer a course that's a rapid diploma. Are you referring to the graduate diploma in early childhood?

The CHAIR: The 10-month fast-track qualification.

TYRONE CARLIN: It's not a fast-track qualification; it's a graduate diploma program that's accredited nationally by ACECQA. And, yes, all programs that are offered by the university are overseen through the academic board accreditation processes. Of course, the academic board is, in effect, a delegated committee of council.

The CHAIR: You say it's a graduate diploma, but the qualification that you need before you do the diploma, is that in some sort of teaching or early childhood field, or could it be anything?

TYRONE CARLIN: No, broadly speaking, the admissions criteria for that program and many other graduate diplomas that are intended to either upskill someone who has a prior background in a particular industry or to do, in effect, lateral training of people who are coming from other professional backgrounds into a context broadly speaking consists of two elements—either there is at least a prior AQF-level bachelor's degree, which could be in any discipline, but the admissions criteria for this program also entertain the possibility that there might be other conditions upon which someone is admitted, and that could be a combination of some other form of diploma, qualification and or work experience.

The CHAIR: When you say "entertain the possibility", you mean you could either have a degree or you could have a diploma and some additional experience and then be eligible to get this qualification?

TYRONE CARLIN: That's correct.

The CHAIR: You may know that I'm chairing an inquiry into early childhood education. At our second hearing a couple of weeks ago, we had a panel of leading academics in early childhood educator education. Every single one of them considered that the 10-month fast-track qualification like the one that SCU is offering to be

CORRECTED

dangerous, inappropriate and even offensive to those early childhood education professionals working every day in the sector. What do you say to that?

TYRONE CARLIN: Again, I quibble with the use of the term "fast-track" because, relevantly, and within the context of the AQF framework, it is an AQF nationally accredited qualification. It is a graduate diploma. It's a graduate diploma that, in the context of the AQF, is the same as any other graduate diploma. It is no more or less accelerated in its offer than any of the others. I'm aware that there are quite passionately held beliefs in relation to the virtues and vices of graduate diplomas as a pathway into the teaching profession, whether that be in early childhood or primary or secondary education. If you look across the federation of our nation at the moment, you will see a fragmentation of approach across the different jurisdictions. You'll know that traditionally a three-year undergraduate degree and a graduate diploma was the standard approach, which most of our classroom teachers that are teaching in our primary and secondary schools today went through.

For every person that I've met in the sector who has a strident opinion in relation to the inappropriateness of the graduate diploma pathway, I've met another who stridently believes the converse. Relevantly for us, however, is one central truth, and that is that this is the standard that the Commonwealth has set for that workforce setting. So we, along with 26 other providers, are responding to that framework in a way that we are comfortable with. As I said to you before, the course, which is a course of long standing at our university—it's been offered for more than a decade at Southern Cross University—has been through all of the ordinary accreditation and oversight processes and cycles through our academic governance through the academic board. And there is nothing unusual or different in the composition or design of the program than you would see for any other graduate diploma at the relevant AQF level.

The CHAIR: Have you had complaints from students who believe they're getting a poor training experience because they were put by your university into underperforming early childhood centres?

TYRONE CARLIN: Thank you very much for the opportunity to respond to that. The university takes incredibly seriously its obligations with respect to the preparation for students who go into these programs and for the safety and efficacy of what occurs in these early learning centres; it's a central consideration for us. One of the things that we're able to do in the context of determining where we place students is rely on an interchange of data with the national accrediting body ACECQA. You'll know that ACECQA, in effect, has a spectrum of different ratings that it places on early learning centres. Our policy requires that if a centre is not meeting standards that we do not place students in those centres. You'll be aware that there has been public discussion of this question of whether or not students at the university have intentionally been placed in a centre or any centres that, from ACECQA's point of view, are not meeting standards.

We're aware that there are two students out of the total number of students that have been placed where that occurred. The circumstances in which that took place were broadly as follows. At the time the placement was made and that the university checked the status of that particular centre, that centre was meeting standards on the ACECQA register. At some point—subsequent to the commencement of the placement is our understanding—ACECQA changed the status of that centre. We did not know that at the time. To me, what that speaks to is not something that we should be cavalier about. That raises questions for us that we're working through in relation to how we, to an even more satisfactory degree and on a consistent basis, have constant vigilance as to the status of those centres.

To be clear, to my understanding, there have been only two students where this occurred. The circumstances in which it occurred are as I have described to you, which is to say that the university made attempts under its processes to adhere to its policy—which I've broadly described—and did not know at the time that the students were placed that the status had changed. Of course, we have subsequently learnt that and you've referred to that.

The CHAIR: I think that was very useful to get that on the record. It's incredibly useful for my Committee, when we're trying to work out a systemic solution to some of these issues, to hear that sort of broader picture. Thank you for that, but I will have to put the rest of my questions to you as supplementaries. Can I turn to Professor Dowton? As I understand it, you've justified proposed redundancies at Macquarie University in the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Science and Engineering variously in terms of evolving market demands, ongoing relevance and maintaining the university's financial resilience and sustainability. Is that a fair summary of the rationale for these redundancies?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: I thank the Chair for the question. Yes, we do focus on a number of aspects, including the ones you've raised, as well as, importantly, ensuring that our curriculum offerings are meeting the demands of Australian employers. That is a very key part of our planning work. We're also ensuring that the quality of the education we're providing to our students is at a very high level and continually improving. Of course, financial stability is a part of the consideration as well.

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The CHAIR: Some of the disciplines facing some of the most severe academic art cuts include politics, sociology, communication, media studies and also early childhood education, at a time when it's well acknowledged that there's a national shortage of early childhood teachers. Are those less relevant today than they once were? Why are they the subjects being cut?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: Again, I thank you for the question there. I'd make the distinction between, as we call them at Macquarie University, courses and the sub-components of courses, which are units. A number of the ones which you raised—the international relations and politics, for argument's sake—are being moved from being a freestanding degree program to the potential to be part of another degree. Students will still have the opportunity to study a number of those particular subjects at Macquarie University under a different name. Part of what is being streamlined—and I want to be very transparent about this—is there is a reduction in the number of units that might be component parts of a course offered by the university.

The decision-making, as we have it standing right now—we have not moved the implementation yet. The proposals have been put out. We have received feedback from staff and the union. We have taken that into consideration and are moving towards implementation, including, I would say, some very helpful suggestions made by staff and the union which are being incorporated into the implementation planning if this goes forward. We are certainly seeing that where there is demand, not only courses but units would be maintained. For many of the units—or even courses—that are being cut, they would certainly be ones we would like to be able to keep, but the fundamental reality is that when you have a single student involved in a course, not just a subject in that course, it is simply not viable to maintain that course.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If I could turn to Professor Annamarie Jagose, I refer to reports from earlier this year that the University of Sydney was advertising for three positions to "Indigenise" and "decolonise" the university curriculum. Can you explain what it means to Indigenise and decolonise the curriculum?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Thanks for your question. I'm not sure that I know exactly of those three roles that you refer to. Generally speaking, indigenising and decolonising curricula is usually associated with working to ensure that western parameters and traditions of knowledge are not the only viewpoints offered to students. To fairly randomly think of an example, you might imagine Indigenising a curriculum in, say, astronomy by including some traditional Indigenous understandings of constellations, for example, and talking about how that sits with more traditional European models of understanding.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Are prospective employers and students calling for the curriculum to be decolonised? What is the evidence for this measure?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Can you repeat the question, please?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Are prospective employers and students calling for the curriculum to be decolonised? What is the evidence before the university for this action?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: There are many instances in employment and elsewhere where high levels of cultural competency and diverse knowledge bases are respected, admired and sought by employers. Yes, I would say this is a contingent part of teaching. It's expected that our students will graduate with sophisticated, nuanced understandings of epistemological systems that they are learning.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Professor, I understand that there were three positions advertised. What were the roles? What was the cost to the university?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: As I started out mentioning, I don't actually know which three positions you're referring to. I'm very happy to take that on notice and come back to you to confirm.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Anything on the cost?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Without knowing what the positions are, I wouldn't hazard a guess at the cost.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I appreciate that you need to seek more information on this, but were the roles available only for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Again, with no knowledge of the roles, I wouldn't be able to say whether they were identified positions or not. I can take all of that on notice.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: What is it about the University of Sydney, Australia's oldest university, and its curriculum that is so racist, concerning and objectionable that it needs to be decolonised?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Perhaps I could untangle some of it. I don't think a commitment to Indigenisation suggests the prevalence of racist curricula. I don't think those two things go together at all. I'd like to very strongly uncouple those. As the oldest university in Australia, we have an absolute responsibility to think

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about what First Nations knowledges are and how we transmit those. This is our place of learning. It's a very important component of our students' training at the University of Sydney and, I dare say, at many other universities.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I understand that all universities are facing into budget headwinds. I'm assuming the University of Sydney is no different. How is this sort of expenditure—which, quite frankly, sounds like political activism—a good use of budget resources?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I wouldn't describe this kind of position as activism. I think about it as quite consistent with our learning practices and many of the values of our graduate attributes.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Isn't this another example of entrenching separatism in our oldest university at a time when we should be focusing on issues that unite us?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I think you come to a really great point there. I think social cohesion has been a concern on many campuses over recent years. I don't see anything separatist, however, in aspects of curriculum Indigenisation. There's nothing that requires people to stand on opposite sides in relation to Indigenisation. It's a more rich, highly nuanced curriculum that we are offering our students.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: On a wider question to other vice-chancellors here today, I'm wondering whether there'd be a similar plan to Indigenise and decolonise your own university curriculum.

ANDREW PARFITT: The approach that UTS takes is a little different in this regard. Our approach is essentially through a program that we call our Indigenous Graduate Attribute, to work with the various professions and to work with the various disciplines to ensure that graduates have the skills and capability to work in their profession where it relates to, in particular, how they engage with First Nations people and communities. That's the real purpose behind our particular program.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: I will turn to an issue relating to foreign influence. Professor Jagose, I will put this back to you again, together with Professor Dowton and Professor Perkovic. There has been media concerning the influence of the People's Republic of China and Iran at Australian universities. As we know, these foreign powers are reported as trying to interfere in the Australian university and research sector. The Federal Government and university leaders created the University Foreign Interference Taskforce to stop foreign countries from secretly undermining our democracy, stealing our research or suppressing discussion on Australian campuses. Could each of you confirm to the Committee here that there are no investigations underway into foreign state or actor influence within student groups or any academic research institutes at your university?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Did you want to start with me?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: If you could.

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Yes, sure. We work closely with the Australian Government to ensure that we are complying with all laws and identifying and managing relevant risks. To the best of my knowledge, we have no confirmed foreign interference issues on campus at present.

S. BRUCE DOWTON: I can confirm the same for Macquarie University and would commend the collaborative nature of the University Foreign Interference Taskforce, a collaboration between various Commonwealth agencies and universities, where we have jointly planned the oversight of any foreign collaboration in universities. That has been a very successful program. We all, I believe, have staffed up to be able to be compliant with that. My university certainly had to add extra staff in order to meet the compliance obligations. I can report to the members of this Committee that certainly our trajectory of research, when UFIT was introduced, did change with some national jurisdictions around the world, and we no longer participate in any areas of research with universities from China or Iran, for example, that have dual-use technologies. As an example that might be one that would cause concern for our Government and for Australia.

VLADO PERKOVIC: Thank you for the question. We certainly acknowledge the value and importance of the research undertaken at our universities collectively, and the fact that that makes it of interest to lots of bodies within this country and also outside. We, like my colleagues, have been working very closely with the Australian Government and with the relevant security apparatus within the Government to manage risk, to minimise risk and to address any concerns. I'm not aware of any active external investigations at the moment in that regard.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Furthermore, have there been any academic meetings between the respective universities and members of the Iranian embassy in the past year, or any collaboration with Iran on joint research projects with the universities?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Not to the best of my knowledge.

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S. BRUCE DOWTON: It's the same for Macquarie University. I'm certainly not aware that we have had any contact from the Iranian diplomatic corps.

VLADO PERKOVIC: Similarly, I'm not aware of any such contact nor any arrangements, to my knowledge.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Back to you, Professor Annamarie Jagose. Does University of Sydney consider itself to be an Australian university?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Yes, I would say we consider ourselves to be an Australian university.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Professor, I note a recent media article talking about sandstone units accused of dropping academic standards. There are some serious issues outlined in the article concerning matters such as the requirement for English proficiency being, essentially, dropped or not properly enforced in some courses. Professor, is this the case at Sydney with some postgraduate courses where the standard for English proficiency is being dropped?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I am genuinely grateful for this question, because it gives me the opportunity to say that the University of Sydney has the highest English language proficiency requirements in the whole of Australia. Our standard English language proficiency requirement is set for undergraduate and postgraduate at an overall IELTS score of between 7.5 and 6.5, and more than half of our programs have an IELTS requirement of 7 or 7.5. We stand by our English proficiency levels. We're very confident that we have set them ambitiously.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Professor, do you think an overreliance on foreign revenue could ultimately compromise the university's mission in relation to the provision of courses of study, carrying out research to meet the needs of New South Wales and the Australian community on issues relating to this?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Can you repeat the question, please?

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: It is about the overreliance on foreign revenue in terms of meeting the needs of foreign students and what that might mean if there are changes to English proficiency and standards in the research conducted at the university.

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Given that we have the highest English proficiency standards in the country, that doesn't seem like an enormous risk for the University of Sydney.

The Hon. RACHEL MERTON: Professor Dowton, I think when we last met, we spoke about the compulsory Aboriginal study module, and that we tabled documents in terms of social media posts and student communication to say to students, "You must complete mandatory Aboriginal training before your enrolled modules would be made available to you." I think it might have covered some cultural language issues or cultural issues relating to the topic. At that time of the discussion, you were going to undertake a review, with a view of looking to change the compulsion on that. I'm just looking for an update on that.

S. BRUCE DOWTON: I appreciate that question. Thank you very much. I can update the members of this Committee that we did conduct that review and that particular program for our students is an encouraged program, but it is not a mandatory program. I would again like to correct the record from prior that materials were not withheld from students even back then. But right now we did conduct the review to which I referred last year, and we have made adjustments to that. It is no longer a mandatory training program but is encouraged.

The Hon. WES FANG: Professor Carlin, why do some of your academics working in smaller units find themselves being required to work more hours than some of those working in the larger units? Why are they not paid for the extra time that they are required to do?

TYRONE CARLIN: All of our academics have workloads allocated to them in accordance with the academic workload framework and the enterprise agreement, and I'm not aware of instances where that does not hold true.

The Hon. WES FANG: Does that mean that hasn't been raised with you?

TYRONE CARLIN: We have a mechanism that is defined in our enterprise agreement, which centres around the operation of something that we call the academic workload committee. That committee naturally traverses a whole series of things, and it is comprised of representatives of the leadership team of the university, as well as staff who are nominated to be part of it. They traverse lots of issues. There is a particular process defined under the enterprise agreement for the use of that committee and other mechanisms to, in effect, formally notify us of a concern about the sort of matter that you've adverted to. I'm not aware that through that committee structure, at least to my recent recollection—and I'm very happy to take this on notice and confirm to you—that I have seen a matter formally raised, pursuant to that defined process.

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The Hon. WES FANG: Accepting that there may not have been a formalised process in relation to this, has any staff member, or any contact from the staff community that you have, raised the issue that the staff at smaller centres are required to do more work? This is the first time you've heard it?

TYRONE CARLIN: It has generally been my experience in universities that the conversation runs in the converse direction. You'll appreciate that, in an academic community, conversations about workloads and about the sort of equity and transparency of those are ongoing things. In my present role, I don't really deal quite so directly with those. Those are really matters that are very much in the hands of the faculty deans. That's not an indication that I'm indifferent to those things at all. It's just that for practical purposes the general expectation at our university, again, as set out under the terms of the enterprise, is that, wherever possible, these matters are dealt with collegiately at the local level. It has seemed to me that that has been the way that things have occurred.

The Hon. WES FANG: I guess you're suggesting that—and please tell me if I've interpreted this wrong—this can be resolved without needing to go through the formal process. But if it was to be raised in the formal process and if the feedback that I've received at least is accurate and there are staff that are working in areas that mean they are working more hours in a smaller area and it was formalised, would that trigger something in relation to the pay of staff?

TYRONE CARLIN: Thank you for your question. I think there are probably a couple of constructs for me to make a comment on, and I hope it's helpful for you. The first is that, as you'll know, the enterprise agreement defines an envelope within which work is allocated across a particular year, and I'm very, very confident that work always and everywhere is allocated—and this is academic workload, by the way, and I presume you're referring to the sort of academic side of things.

The Hon. WES FANG: Yes. I don't mean to cut you off. I very much respect the answer you're giving me. I have one last question and then I have to go back to the other room because we are busy regional members and there are not many of us here, especially on a Friday afternoon. If it was raised with you and determined, do you think that it would be considered as an underpayment that staff are expected to work more because they're in one area than another, doing the same role?

TYRONE CARLIN: I think that's a very hypothetical proposition.

The Hon. WES FANG: Indeed it is.

TYRONE CARLIN: What I can say to you is that the university and I take very seriously the obligations under the enterprise agreement, and I'm satisfied that those obligations are being met.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: In the minute I have, perhaps I can pick up from questions from my colleague. I just wanted to confirm, in relation to research collaborations with Iran, I think I understood Professor Dowton that Macquarie has no research collaborations with Iran.

S. BRUCE DOWTON: Correct.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: And, Professor Jagose, is that true of the University of Sydney as well?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: As I said, to the best of my knowledge.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Is that something that you could perhaps investigate and take on notice because I understand you wouldn't be across the whole research—

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Certainly.

S. BRUCE DOWTON: Also happy to do that.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Perhaps I can put it to everybody here. Could you take on notice if there are any research collaborations with Iran? If you could inform us of those, I'd be very grateful.

S. BRUCE DOWTON: Happy to do that.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: My question is to you, Professor Williams. Today I understand students at your university are protesting your university's partnership with Syqe Medical, an Israeli medical cannabis company which apparently has recently announced a partnership with the Israeli Ministry of Defense—who are massacring children in Gaza—to help the IDF soldiers sleep at night. Is that your understanding?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: No, and thank you for the opportunity to clarify that. In fact, I became aware because students handed me a flyer. I looked into that issue very carefully. Through our NICM Health Research Institute, we are part of an international clinical trial for medicinal cannabis for diabetic peripheral neuropathy, which is something that affects about one in two Australians who have diabetes. It leads to pain. It leads to all sorts of problems. It can lead to amputation of limbs. We are doing part of a clinical trial on that, but our

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partnership is actually with an Australian contract research organisation, Syneos. That's our partner; Syqe is not our partner. We actually put a statement up on our website to that effect, and just this last week I kept telling the students that in fact I've looked into this carefully. It meets all legal, regulatory and ethical requirements, and it's clearly directed at solving a very major health problem for Australians.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: I think I'm understanding you're suggesting there that there's a kind of middleman in all of this, but my understanding is that Syqe remains the global sponsor of the trial—

GEORGE WILLIAMS: That's correct.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: —and the profits of the trial will go to Syqe and that they will benefit if regulatory approval is granted. Is it true or is it slightly misleading to suggest that a middleman is the one making the ties through Western Sydney University?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: I think this is just how these trials are run. You contract with an Australian organisation. It's quite commonly part of a global process. We're not a partner with that global organisation. When we've looked at it carefully, I'm satisfied it has a suitable Australian partner dealing with a very major problem for Australians. As you can imagine, in these areas it's not uncommon that these massive global partnerships will bring in a number of partners, and I absolutely acknowledge that Syqe is part of that at the international level. It's not a direct relationship with us, but they are the global organisation leading it. How we approach this is that we look at our obligations, and there are no sanctions in place in dealing with this organisation. It's clearly directed to an important medical problem.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: So if there were sanctions, that would change your view at this point in time?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: We will always comply. For example, with Russian sanctions, if they apply, we're always complying with our obligations. The important thing that we do as an organisation is we follow government policy, we follow the law as it applies in these cases—

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Professor, are you aware of how many Palestinian and Lebanese students there are at the university and that they would be so disturbed? Hence the protest of the fact that their money is literally going towards a company, ultimately, whether through a middleman. But if we are to look at this with integrity, you would understand why those students are suggesting that what the university is doing could be much improved by not having that relationship, notwithstanding and recognising the beneficial impacts of the trial.

GEORGE WILLIAMS: Indeed I've spoken to many students about this. In fact, I've had a discussion at the student representative council about this. I've also talked about the other things that we're doing. For example, I think it is appropriate we continue with this. I've looked carefully into it. I've been briefed and looked at the documents. We've also started, for example, a People Fleeing Conflict Program, where we can't change the geopolitics. We have 35 people from Gaza at the moment who are assisting through that program, and we have a lot of things we're putting in place that students are asking us to do. We're absolutely conscious of the distress and enormous pain within our community. I'm hearing that daily from people who have lost loved ones in the conflict, so it's very much front of mind.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: Would you reconsider? Would you have another look? I understand the explanation about this middleman partner and that there are some benefits, but at the end of the day there is this overriding, overarching fact, and that is: This company is supplying products to the military in Israel and it's causing many people stress on your campus.

GEORGE WILLIAMS: It's something that I've looked at carefully. If something changed, of course I would, but I took this very seriously. In fact, we've also set up a guideline for determining how we engage in these sorts of partnerships.

Ms SUE HIGGINSON: When you say, "If something changed," beyond sanctions, what else might change your mind?

GEORGE WILLIAMS: I don't know. I suppose you always look at if the circumstances change, of course I'd reconsider, but at the moment I'm fully briefed on, have looked at it carefully and I'm satisfied that not only is it dealing with a critical medical issue but it's sufficiently at arm's length not to raise ethical issues. But, more importantly for us, we comply with government policy, and I have very clear advice it does comply with our regulatory and other obligations. We're an educational institution. We have to comply with the law, and that's the approach I think is appropriate for us to take.

The CHAIR: Perhaps if we could go to you, Professor Lu. Did your university council have a formal vote to approve the opening of a campus in Saudi Arabia?

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G. Q. MAX LU: Yes, as an Australian leading university with a lot of transnational education, we are very proud of the fact that we have the first, very successful campus in Dubai—33 years old, almost 6,000 students now. The latest addition to that portfolio of transnational campuses is a proposed campus in Riyadh. That's at the early stages. I think the partnership is still being formed. Yes, our council did approve the exploration of establishing this campus, which is part of the portfolio of the University of Wollongong Global Enterprises, which is a wholly owned subsidiary company.

The CHAIR: The university council did have a formal vote to approve that opening?

G. Q. MAX LU: It hasn't been opened, Madam Chair. I think it just—

The CHAIR: Sorry, to approve the project or whatever it was taken to sign and begin that project?

G. Q. MAX LU: Yes. The council did discuss and approve the initiation of the project.

The CHAIR: Can I ask how the opening of a campus in Saudi Arabia met the principal functions for the university under its governing Act?

G. Q. MAX LU: Madam Chair, I think, as we all would be aware, a globally leading university, by its nature, is very global in education and in research. The revenue generated from internationalisation, including onshore international students and offshore transnational campuses, would help to cross-subsidise research and also teaching and other operational costs at the home campus. That is the case of the University of Wollongong and also the case of the University of Wollongong's Global Enterprises, which makes a profit that is actually coming back in the form of dividend.

The CHAIR: So the university council, then, took the view that you were meeting the principal function of providing facilities, particularly—I'm looking at section 6 (2) (a) of your governing Act, which says:

- (2) The University has the following principal functions for the promotion of its object—
 - (a) the provision of facilities for education and research of university standard, having particular regard to the needs of the Illawarra region,

The assumption, then, is anything that is making a profit offshore is then able to be fed back into the Illawarra region. Is that the idea?

G. Q. MAX LU: If I get your question right, I think—first and foremost, I think the University of Wollongong is an anchoring institution in the Illawarra region. It serves the community through producing the skilled workforce that is going to support the community's industry and the health district, of which we're very proud. I think for 50 years the University of Wollongong has achieved tremendously in this regard, serving our community. In terms of the internationalisation activities, I think they are only going to strengthen the education of our domestic students and research. Otherwise, the university, for the sake of globalisation, now seeks to expand. I think that is the promise of—

The CHAIR: Does that mean that UOW Global Enterprises is making a profit year after year?

G. Q. MAX LU: Yes. I've been here only three months. I'm still on a steep learning curve. With respect to the details of the numbers, I can take it on notice. My understanding is that it's been making a profit year after year.

The CHAIR: If you could perhaps, yes, take that on notice. We'd love to see the financials to see if that's the case, because, obviously, that would then back up the function. For example, I understand that the record for University of Wollongong Hong Kong has been quite weak and has actually gone backwards since University of Wollongong bought it, in terms of numbers of students. But, unfortunately, we are unable to see the financials for either UOW College Hong Kong Limited or the broader UOW Global Enterprises. So any information you can provide us on notice would be really good.

G. Q. MAX LU: I'll take it on notice and provide more details on those questions.

The CHAIR: Then if you could show us how those profits are then fed back into the local facilities. That would be very useful as well.

G. Q. MAX LU: Okay.

The CHAIR: Have any staff raised with you concerns that they will need to be working on approvals or quality assurance or other course management for the Saudi Arabian campus that they have an ethical issue with, given that some people, if they were in Saudi Arabia, wouldn't be able themselves to go to that campus, because, for instance, they might be part of the LGBTQTI+ community, or they might—even an unaccompanied female staffer, I believe, wouldn't be allowed on that campus. Have staff raised that issue with you? Are they concerned?

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G. Q. MAX LU: I wasn't here at the point of the approval or the initiation of the project. I'm aware there are some concerns, but first and foremost we take the quality assurance and the high education standards very seriously. All our offerings, the programs in overseas campuses, have gone through the usual process of quality assuring and academic senate approval. There are concerns around the values and the red lines. I have also been advised that the board that is governing the UOW Global Enterprises take that very seriously and they assess any new projects or any expansions, based on commercial value, based on our values as a whole, and, if there are red lines that the partners cross or they cannot really meet our requirement, it will not proceed with the project.

The CHAIR: If I could go back to you, Professor Dowton. I understand that a number of senior elected academic union officials, including the current president, secretary and vice-president of the Macquarie University branch of the NTEU, are in scope for redundancy. Does the university consider that impact to be fair and proportionate?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: I'm not aware, as I sit here, of the particular individuals who are in scope or out of scope for the particular change processes that have been proposed.

The CHAIR: The three discipline areas where the three elected union officials work make up the majority of proposed redundancies in the faculty of arts. Sociology, where the president is employed, I understand, faces 11 redundancies out of 14 staff. So it's statistically likely that the redundancy is going to fall quite heavily on senior elected union officials. I accept that that may not be intended, but what has been put in place to ensure that there isn't an inadvertent overburden on union officials in these redundancy processes?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: First of all, I'd point out, as far as I'm aware—and I thank you for the question, Chair—senior elected union officials in the university are provided time relief to attend to their union duties. I think that is a move by the university to accord them respect for the work that they do. I'm also aware that, as a part of the enterprise agreement, which we negotiate in good faith with the union every few years, the construct in which negotiations around change proposals might occur are set down. I'm not aware that any advocacy has been made. It may have been made to exclude union officials from those negotiations, but I'm not aware that we have any requirement in the enterprise agreement, which we do adhere to very strictly in our change proposals for union officials to be exempted from any change process.

The CHAIR: That might answer this question, then. I want to know what measures are in place to make sure that when union members raise questions or criticisms at the university, they don't face any kind of professional disadvantage as a result of representing member interests. How do you ensure that happens, particularly at times like this?

S. BRUCE DOWTON: We recognise that it is a very tough time when any university is going through change processes, in accordance with our enterprise agreements. We have, I believe, at Macquarie University—and I suspect across all universities—various seasoned staff who are taking part and guiding the academic leaders. By that, I mean individuals who have very strong industrial relations backgrounds, experience, education and training to be able to guide the negotiations. Certainly, I'm not aware that any concern has been raised on my campus about a particular instance of where a union official might be targeted in some way.

We have no knowledge, beyond those who declare it through being in an elected position, who the unionised members of our staff are. We used to have access to that information per force of collecting dues through the salary system. In my university, my understanding is now that those are direct bank debits. So we have no knowledge of who's a union member and who's not, unless they declare it themselves or they are in an elected position of the union in the university, and therefore take part in the negotiations of the enterprise agreement, the discussions around change processes, and the feedback with the university about those change processes as a part of what is mandated under the enterprise agreement.

The CHAIR: I might go to the University of Sydney and Professor Annamarie Jagose. Can I ask how many formal change management processes the uni has initiated since 2023, and how many staff positions have been affected by each of them?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I will definitely have to take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Also, whether the university has conducted any assessment of the mental health impacts of repeated restructuring on staff, and what the findings of that may have been?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: The university has very recently undertaken a change in how we think about our change processes. I think we've acknowledged that sometimes we have not always led change well, and we want to do a better job of that. We talked with the unions—the NTEU and CPSU—towards the end of last year. Unsurprisingly, they shared that view. We took the pretty unprecedented action—at least, at Sydney—of declaring

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a change pause for six months. From the end of December last year until 30 June this year, no new change processes were able to be initiated.

Across that same period, the leadership of the university and the leadership of the unions worked together across a series of what we call "change summits" to think about how could we lead change better than we had been. On the university side, that has led to a set of principles and thresholds that are more defined than we have been operating with previously, and we will, in the next couple of weeks, issue a joint statement from the unions and the university leadership to the wider staff and students around what we've learned through the change summit process and so forth.

What I will note with some pleasure is that—although I had an apprehension that if you close off an avenue for six months, perhaps you get to the end of that period and you experience a deluge of change proposals coming forward—it has been very pleasing to me and others involved in this process to find that across the educative process of those change summits, it seems that we have shifted the dial around what can trigger a change. Colleagues are now becoming more adept at thinking about what are other avenues open to where there needs to be shifts or changes, as opposed to the disruption of what you note is a full industrial change process.

It's very early days yet. It's a fresh approach. I feel, you can probably tell, reasonably optimistic. There will always be a need in an organisation as large as the University of Sydney for some formal industrial change processes. I think we were overusing them, and I think we can, and are, determined to do better.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Professor Jagose, perhaps if I could start with you. SafeWork NSW has now completed its investigation into the psychosocial hazards created by antisemitism on your campus. According to press reports, they found that while you and the university "had the authority, policies and procedures in place to eliminate antisemitism", you failed to act for 11 months and only did so when SafeWork NSW began investigating and negative media stories started to pile up. Did you only act because there were SafeWork inspectors on campus?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: No. The date of the SafeWork inspections on campus were late last year and early this year, and our various actions in relation to our commissioning, for example, of the Hodgkinson review—which has proven to be something of a gold standard setting for the sector, as I see a significant number of other universities now adapting versions of the Hodgkinson review recommendations—well precedes the visit of the SafeWork inspectors.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So was the commissioning of a review acting to eliminate antisemitism on campus?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Commissioning a review was to get an expert external opinion on the settings that the university uses to make the campus a safe and welcoming place for all.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: You felt you needed an external review to be able to make the campus a safe and welcoming place for all?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I think we found it a very useful thing to do. It will have escaped no-one's notice what scrutiny the University of Sydney was under for those long months and, as you note, what a subject of media and other commentary. In those instances, it seems to me sometimes very appropriate to seek an expert, informed and impartial external view.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What was the reason for that scrutiny?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I think it was that there was a great deal of social unrest across the Australian communities broadly and, as microcosms of that, I think we saw some of that play out on campuses.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Was that handled in a way that Jewish staff and students felt safe on your campus?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I think the university and certainly our Vice-Chancellor, Mark Scott, has publicly said in inquiries like this that we acknowledge that we didn't always do everything perfectly. I think we have worked extremely hard to make sure that we have those balances right. At times, Jewish staff and students certainly shared with us their senses of lack of safety and made complaints through our processes and so forth, as did some of our Palestinian students, and students on encampments made similar kinds of claims. The difficult task for a university, which is not itself taking a political position but trying to create spaces where deliberative discussion can be safely undertaken, is to take that middle road. I think the situation I would like to describe to you is one in which there can be criticism and/or commendation from every compass point.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: When Jewish staff and students came to you, as you said, and reported concerns about safety, it seems that the only measure you can point to is the commissioning of an external review.

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How did you act immediately to resolve safety issues which were brought to you by Jewish staff and students? Or did it take a SafeWork report for real action to begin?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: As I've said, and I think I said it pretty clearly, the SafeWork report postdates a lot of those actions. Let me also say, in case it wasn't clear—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: With respect, Professor Jagose, the only action to which you've pointed so far is the commissioning of an external review.

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I'm very happy to point to some other things, if you would like.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Thank you.

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: We engage very closely with our Jewish staff and students and external stakeholders.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Can I ask you about that? If you engage so closely with them, why did they feel the need to make a SafeWork report?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: That is up to them to determine.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: How often is the University of Sydney subject to a SafeWork investigation? Five times a year? Once a year? Once a decade?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I would have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Can I suggest to you that the fact that you're taking it on notice means that it's not a regular occurrence? If people are raising concerns and they feel that those concerns are being satisfactorily engaged with, they won't feel the need to go to that next step of a SafeWork inquiry. Perhaps the reason that Jewish staff needed to go to SafeWork was that they felt those engagements were not as satisfactory, as you were perhaps suggesting they may be.

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I want to acknowledge the legitimacy of Jewish staff and students' feelings in every instance. I also would like to point out that there is not a single homogenous Jewish staff and student positionality that we're discussing here. I didn't intend any of my comments to belittle those feelings, which I acknowledge and take very seriously. For that reason, it's not for me to say whether or not staff and students should go to Safe Work Australia. I absolutely defend their right to do so.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The SafeWork inspector is reported to have found:

Jewish workers and students experienced antisemitism daily whilst on campus, creating a workplace of fear, anxiousness and a fear of retribution towards Jewish workers and students because they were Jewish ...

What work is the university doing to not just stop the antisemitism but to positively create a culture where Jewish staff and students—and, indeed, all staff and students—feel welcome and valued? Having created the damage, what are you doing to heal the damage?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: The university has done a lot of work in relation to antisemitism and all forms of racial prejudice in terms of policy direction, particularly in terms of educational processes. I would like to say that the report that you are citing is not a SafeWork finding but an internal report that was never released to the University of Sydney. Had it been released to the University of Sydney, we would have opposed it on many grounds of inaccuracy and misrepresentation.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Do you dispute the fact that Jewish staff and students experienced antisemitism daily when they were on campus, especially during the period of the encampment?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I think I have just said very clearly that I acknowledge the feelings of Jewish staff and students and would seek to counter a view that opposed that.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If the finding that you're contesting, or that you said you would contest if it was put to you, was that they experienced antisemitism daily—I'm sorry. I don't understand what it is that you find contestable about that statement.

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: The SafeWork report that came to the university formally said that on the basis of its findings, and having conducted two site visits in September 2024 and February 2025, they were not conducting any further investigation and that they were well satisfied that we had safety issues in hand at the university.

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The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Does the fact that they were satisfied that you had safety issues in hand in any way say that they didn't find that there were safety issues that existed? In fact, what is reported to have been found is that the safety issues were a daily experience of antisemitism.

The Hon. STEPHEN LAWRENCE: Point of order: It is an incredibly confusing question in circumstances where "they" in one instance is an individual inspector and in another instance the entire organisation, which, as I understand it, did not uphold that finding. I think it needs to be put more clearly.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I'm happy to reframe. The report says that the SafeWork inspector found that Jewish students and staff experienced antisemitism daily. I understood you, Professor Jagose, to have said that that was a finding that would have been contested by the university, had it been put to you. I'm asking you, what is contestable about a finding that during the period of the encampment, Jewish staff and students experienced antisemitism daily when they attended campus?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: What I would like to say is how importantly we take the safety and wellbeing of all of our staff and students. It's a very central value, and we've worked extremely hard to make sure that the campus environment is a safe and welcoming place. As I say, we've done quite a lot of policy re-pointing and we've done a huge amount of educative outreach. One thing I would like to—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Thank you. Can I take you back to the question that I asked? Would you contest a finding that during the period of the encampment, Jewish staff and students experienced antisemitism daily?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I contest that that was a finding.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I understand that you're contesting that it was a SafeWork finding. The SafeWork inspector found that. Would you contest that finding on the facts by the SafeWork inspector?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: We heard from our own staff and our own students that they felt unsafe on campus during parts of the encampment. There's nothing in me that contests that.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So, therefore, you would agree with that statement?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I think I said very early on in my response to you, and I hope it's been very clear, that there is nothing in me that wants to contest the lived experience of any of our staff and students.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Perhaps I could take you back to the earlier question. I heard your statements about educational processes and policy. How is that addressing a culture to make sure that Jewish staff and students attending the university today feel not only an absence of antisemitism, but a positive welcome?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: It's really quite genuinely difficult to find a proxy for human feeling at scale, but I would like to suggest that the volume of complaint is quite a useful proxy in this instance. I would point out the fact of the hundreds of complaints across the previous year, from the point of the encampment to post our introduction of that suite of policies and some of those educational outreaches. I can say that from October 2023 to June 2024, we had 171 complaints. In the period since those interventions, we have had 24.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: We could only see that as positive. I wonder if we're talking at cross-purposes. I'm not really asking about measures to educate about and stop antisemitism. I'm asking about the next step, which is to welcome. But perhaps we can move on to something else. With respect to the Hodgkinson review, how many of the recommendations have been accepted by the university?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: The Hodgkinson review, as I think I have previously testified, importantly was accepted by the senate in principle. The university executive was then asked to think about how the various recommendations might be implemented. We established a good process around this. Almost all of the recommendations are completed. Many of them are inside the suite of policy re-pointings I talked about. A very major piece of work around complaints management dealt with a number of other recommendations. We found that we had a very labyrinthine process of how someone might raise a complaint. Often students and staff didn't know which was the right channel to go to, and, as a consequence, they were going to various places around the university. There wasn't an overall sightline to them. We couldn't really say how many there were, whether they were being treated in similar ways or to an appropriate kind of speed, and so forth. So we appointed a director of complaints halfway through last year. The first really substantial tier of that work has been done. There is now a publicly facing website—which you could go and look at yourself, if you were inclined—to see the single front door for complaints from our staff, our students and, indeed, members of the public. That also took care of another substantial piece of the Hodgkinson review.

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The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Perhaps we can come back to complaints if we have time. With respect to the other recommendations, have formal protocols with both the New South Wales police and the Federal police been concluded?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Prior to the Hodgkinson review, we had in place formal protocols.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I'm wondering, then, why that was a subject of one of the recommendations of the review if they were already in place.

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I can take it on notice.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: The civility rule, is that in place?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: No. The civility rule is the one area where there is still ongoing discussion and consultation. How I would paraphrase the civility rule in Hodgkinson was around a recommendation that there was an obligation for persons—staff and students—to make absolutely clear the intentionality of their speech acts. This came in relation to pro-Palestinian slogans. But the recommendation was this was the new civility rule. It's not difficult to see that this is impractical and possibly even unethical to try and really deliver in practice. Consultation is ongoing.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Why unethical? What ethical system does civil speech and providing a clear context breach?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: As an undergraduate linguist, I would testify to the fact that it is very hard in human speech to always be able to demonstrate your intentionality. Interpretive aspects—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: He used the word "context" rather than "intentionality", didn't he?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Context bespeaks intention. As a university executive, I never want to be in a situation where we have something posing as a rule that is actually unenforceable or leads you into very impractical or even undesirable kind of territory.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But at the heart of the review was what Mr Hodgkinson called the "new civility review". It's the subject of a large number of the recommendations. How does the university accept the review if it cannot implement what we might describe as the guts of the review?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: No, I don't think it's the guts of the review.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: It's a large part of it.

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I think what the university takes from this—and this is a piece that we have done a lot of work on; it's not something we've ignored. We think actually, perhaps I'd say the heart of the civility rule, it's really the obligation to disagree well. The University of Sydney has a had a longstanding commitment to disagreeing well. We understand that that is something that we need to teach staff and students: how do we hold in some cases quite diametrically oppositional positions and still be able to articulate them in a deliberative way that is not damaging or demeaning to others. That, to me, is a defensible interpretation of the civility rule. I'm speaking very personally about that. There's a lot of consultation ongoing at the university across student and staff groups about what will this mean in practice.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Is there an end point to that consultation?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Yes. I'm hoping that we will be finishing that this year.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: "This year" being before the university rises for the end of second semester?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: "This year" being 2025.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: What are you looking for as the outcome? If it's not going to be the civility rule, if you're focusing on "disagree well"—and I don't disagree with that—does the university need to reflect on the fact that "disagree well" did not seem to work very well around the encampment and matters to do with the experience of Jewish staff and students on campus?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Yes, and to be fair, we see any number of not disagreeing well in our wider community, I dare say.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I don't disagree, but if the university is educating our leaders of tomorrow and if we are hoping that education is a great pathway to understanding and change, then there's a particular responsibility on the university to not just say, "The rest of the world is doing it but we will lead". We're looking

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to see the way in which the University of Sydney will lead in civility, and ensuring that everybody feels safe to pursue an education.

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: That's why we have such a massive educational outreach process. We have modules in conflict. We have modules in expressing your viewpoints in contested situations. Our student representatives take those modules as a requirement. They've been taken by thousands of our students and staff.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Are those modules online or in person?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: Online for students. We also have some face-to-face training that staff do. We're a learning institution and we really believe in educative—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: In terms of students completing an online module about disagreeing well, have you got any research about whether that's something that is just "click through" or whether it really has an educative effect for students?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If you could, thank you very much.

The CHAIR: We have two minutes for crossbench and two minutes for the Opposition, and then we will go to Government questions. I have one for all of you. We know there's an enormous and growing mental health crisis, and it's often crashing down on young people of university age. We also know that a lot of universities are going through extremely turbulent job cuts and restructures, which puts a huge psychological strain on staff as well. In that context, what are you each doing to monitor and identify deaths on campus and/or suicides amongst staff and student cohorts? Can I start perhaps with you, Professor Carlin?

TYRONE CARLIN: Sorry, Chair, was your question deaths on campus?

The CHAIR: Deaths and suicides amongst staff and student cohorts—is it something that you monitor?

TYRONE CARLIN: It's absolutely something that we would monitor for within our critical risk reporting framework. I am not aware of any such instances. There have been instances where students have contacted us and expressed an intention to self-harm. We have a system in place across the university that is designed to capture, coordinate, report on and track our responses to that. We've invested quite considerably in enhancing that system and making sure that where there are critical incidents, they are visible to relevant leaders within the institution very quickly. In relation to the suicide, I will take that on notice. I think the broad answer to your question, from the point of view of monitoring for it, is of course we do. Do we have systems in place to help us to be able to keep line of sight to those very tragic circumstances? Indeed.

The CHAIR: Professor Parfitt?

ANDREW PARFITT: I'm not aware of any deaths or suicides on campus, but we are notified occasionally, sadly, of the passing of staff and students, often from family and friends, and then we provide whatever support we're able to in those sorts of circumstances. We're a very large community so, yes, these do occasionally, sadly, occur. Where we actually monitor is often in sentiment that's expressed to staff from students. We have a very large counselling service on campus, so there's access to counselling and students can be referred to counselling. Staff make use of the counselling services as well. We are attuned to the fact that, as in many parts of the community, there are many stresses, both within university life and beyond university life. The wellbeing and safety of staff are certainly key priorities for us.

The CHAIR: I'll go to Professor Perkovic, because you've not spoken already, and then I might take the rest on notice in the interest of time. Do you monitor at your university?

VLADO PERKOVIC: Yes, we do. We obviously take very seriously, as my colleagues have already indicated, the mental health of our staff and students, as well as their physical health. Something like a death or a suicide would clearly be a critical incident that we would monitor very carefully. We also, importantly, implement a range of proactive measures, as others have already mentioned. We have detailed counselling services and our university health service. We've employed a psychiatrist within that to help support our students in particular. And we work very closely with experts at the Black Dog Institute, which is affiliated with us, to look at additional ways of not just implementing activities that will improve mental health, but identifying what those activities would be, particularly those that are most efficacious.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: If we could go back to the civility rule, one of the strengths of that in the Hodgkinson review was that there were consequences attached to it. So if a civility rule isn't in place, and it is a principle of education of disagreeing well, how would the university cope in the future with, for example, the

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signs that were reported by SafeWork, "Jews not allowed"? In the absence of a rule, how does the university deal proactively with that?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: The university would have absolutely no difficulty pre or post a civility rule saying that any sign saying, "Jews are not allowed" would be completely a breach of our codes of conduct and would be acted upon immediately.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: How long did it take to have that sign pulled down when it was displayed during the encampment?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I don't know which sign you're speaking about.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: As I understand, it was not pulled down immediately. What about especially the way that the Prime Minister has recently explained it? What about the chants of, "From the river to the sea?" Is that something that can be chanted if one is to disagree well?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: As I said earlier, it is exactly that kind of slogan that was the context for Hodgkinson's proposal of the civility rule. The civility rule required any speaker who used university facilities to make the meaning of contested words and phrases clear to the audience. If you imagine your scenario of someone chanting a slogan in a protest situation, it's pretty impractical to try to—

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: How does "disagree well" deal with it then, Professor?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: I think "disagree well" asks us—having a rule suggests that things are very black and white and actionable. Unfortunately, we see that some of these things are not—some things are very black and white. The example you gave, completely black and white, no hesitation, wouldn't be allowed under any circumstances, and would result in a serious misconduct. Some other things are more in the grey, interpretively. Disagreeing well is a principle that asks us to take seriously the impact of our actions and words on others and to try to be a bit more empathetic and to try to see things from the perspective of others. Not to give up your own position, but to do so in an understanding that what you say and do has impact.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But where are the consequences to protect others?

ANNAMARIE JAGOSE: We have codes of conduct for both our staff and students, and, in a regular way, when these issues are raised, we use those as instruments to interpretively determine whether lines have been crossed.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: But we know they didn't work.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: I think your time's out.

The CHAIR: Order! That's us disagreeing well. Government questions.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Thank you all very much for appearing today. Before I ask individual questions, I wondered if you all might take on notice to provide your reflections on our progress to the representation of women at the upper echelons of universities in New South Wales. Professor Parfitt, I wondered if I could go to you. You know I have a particular interest in UTS. In an article in *The Australian Financial Review* in April, the journalist reflects:

In 40 years of finance journalism I have never come across a corporate restructuring project as ambitious, as complex and as fraught with risks as the one being undertaken by the University of Technology Sydney. I don't believe any publicly listed company with revenues of more than \$1 billion has attempted to simultaneously change its product offering, slash its frontline staff, introduce a new operating model and roll out a new enterprise resource planning software system.

Given the scale of this restructure and the different components of it, is it appropriate that staff had to find out the details about what I understand is called the Operational Sustainability Initiative by going through a GIPAA freedom of information process?

ANDREW PARFITT: First of all, the complexity of the project—it is certainly true that there are many parts to the work that we're doing, not all of them, of course, associated with operational sustainability, but addressing issues such as technology deficit and systems. Some of the work that we, of necessity, have to do with processes and practices that we have to operate as a university. Many of those issues were actually described and published in a document which was an initial consultation paper released in November 2024.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Could I just jump in there, Professor Parfitt? There are some updates and operational issues. What proportion are they of the \$100 million that you've suggested needs to be saved through the reduction of 400 jobs?

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ANDREW PARFITT: The proportion of the \$100 million in the change that we need to make, around 80 per cent of that is currently workforce and 20 per cent is currently in non-salary items and other items.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Mr Parfitt, I believe that there's been some contestation around the rationale for the \$100 million. I understand that in late July there was an open letter from the professoriate at UTS, which detailed, "Over the last three years, UTS has declared an operating loss of \$240 million. Over the same period, UTS put \$199 million into cash reserves. So net of cash, UTS had an annual deficit of \$14 million, which is not to the scale that we've been worrying about. It's about 1 per cent of its budget. Now UTS plans to invest \$128 million a year from 2027. The plans are yet to be approved, but would not require the \$100 million cuts. UTS already invests an average \$90 million a year, meaning the extra investment is at most \$38 million. And in February this year, UTS stated it can refinance all its debts within targeted credit limits, so the large cash reserve—now at more than \$400 million—can be reinvested." Doesn't that suggest that the haste with which this change is being pursued—and indeed its rationale—is actually just a management decision about when you want to pay back bonds rather than actually a necessity?

ANDREW PARFITT: That's not a correct interpretation, Dr Kaine. I actually wrote quite a detailed response to the open letter—to the professors—and I'm very happy to have that response tabled here. It explains probably the three parts of the argument that was made. One was that we have sufficient cash, that there was no need to make a change that brings the university back into surplus. Part of that does actually have to do with the balance between debt and cash; that is the repayment of the bond. The fundamental issue there is that to borrow money, you have to be able to pay it back, which means, in actual fact, one needs to make a surplus. Universities are not for profit—

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Professor Parfitt, I'll just stop you there because you're dangerously close, I think, to suggesting that I didn't understand that. If we could continue without that kind of comment, that would be appreciated.

ANDREW PARFITT: I'm not questioning your understanding, Dr Kaine, but what I am explaining is that the assertion that we're solely driven by the need to pay back a bond—what we're driven by is the need to restore our finances to a position of being able to make a reliable surplus to operate sustainably into the future. That, by our forecasting, requires us to reduce our expenditure by \$100 million per year in order to ensure that our expenditure doesn't exceed our revenue in the forward period.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: On your website, you state that UTS had a \$100 million deficit in 2024. However, the audited financial statements show a deficit of \$77.95 million. Where does the extra \$22 million figure come from?

ANDREW PARFITT: I'd have to take that on notice. The deficit that we published is the \$79 million or \$81 million that's in the annual report, so I'm not sure where that number comes from. It's certainly declared in the annual report.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: So you can take that on notice and get back to me on that?

ANDREW PARFITT: Yes, absolutely.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: With the maturation of the bond in 2027—the \$300 million bond—did you examine options to refinance or reissue the bond to ease those short-term pressures and avoid cutting the 400 jobs? If you did, what did you investigate?

ANDREW PARFITT: The conclusion was that in the environment that we're operating at the moment, to continue to carry the level of debt, including repayments and an interest, was unwise. I think that the capacity for us to refinance is also inhibited by our capacity to repay. The Moody's credit assessment of the university, which was released a couple of months ago now, in actual fact pointed out the dilemma that in order to retain the credit rating of Aa1, which would enable us to be able to borrow in favourable terms, the university would have to execute the Operational Sustainability Initiative.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Let's go back to the Operational Sustainability Initiative, because I think I interrupted you—my apologies for that—when I asked about whether it's appropriate that staff hadn't got the level of detail they needed and had to resort to a GIPAA process. I've had a look at the GIPAA documents. They are heavily redacted as to be almost useless. Is it appropriate that the staff needed to get the information from there and not from the university itself?

ANDREW PARFITT: The information that we provided in relation to the operational sustainability was outlined in some detail in a discussion paper in November. I understand the desire of staff to have more and more information, much of which we had in the very long sequence of presentations and engagement with staff. We'd been through it in some detail. I'm sorry if staff felt that they had not got the information. Then there was a

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subsequent GIPAA for information of all different sorts that is available. We have been, I think, open with staff around the challenges that we face around the financial position of the university. We have discussed with staff over many years each year's finance plan. It is a five-year plan which underpins the budget that we set in any given year. We've talked to the issues that are associated with the—

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: I genuinely apologise for interrupting. I have the shortest amount of anyone for this afternoon, so I genuinely apologise. I will put some questions on notice about specifics, if that is the case. We are going to be holding a different inquiry in which we'll have a lot more time to consider these issues. Keeping with the Operational Sustainability Initiative, though, I understand that KPMG was engaged for that for an initial four-and-a-bit million increase to nearly \$7 million over four or five months. How much has UTS spent altogether on consultants and contingent contractors as part of the OSI? As a separate part of that question, how much has been spent on wellbeing consultants?

ANDREW PARFITT: I'll have to take that question on notice. The spend on the KPMG part, as you correctly pointed out, is \$7 million. The five-year return from the operational sustainability project is intended to return about \$350 million to the university. The effort that we're putting in and the care we're taking to try to make the proposals that are able to be consulted by staff to make the best approach to be able to make the savings that we believe we need to make necessitates a very good insight into the operation of the university and the financial challenge.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: You said "consultation with staff". I received a flurry of concerned emails, texts and communications from staff a week last Friday—I suspect others around the table did as well—about the suspension of 146 subjects, which I understand wasn't the subject of consultation. Perhaps you can take it on notice as to whether UTS Council was advised of that. I'm a bit concerned about consultation. I would like, if you could, on notice, for you to provide to me details of what consultation took place before the suspension of those courses. Indeed, related to that, did you seek advice from whoever you've engaged to represent you at the Fair Work Commission to advise you that it was a good idea to suspend those courses whilst you're in the middle of a dispute about the structural change that you are undertaking?

ANDREW PARFITT: Thank you for the question. I think that highlights the challenge that we have around a range of issues colliding at a point in time. I think I have indicated to you that the \$100 million in savings, we believe, is a necessary component to put us onto a sustainable footing. There was a financial pressure. We absolutely understand the stress that this places on staff and their psychosocial wellbeing. We are trying to manage that as best as we can, as has been pointed out earlier in this Committee. Change is a challenge for everybody, and the pressures of change, particularly with imminent job losses.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: Indeed.

ANDREW PARFITT: Coming to the issue that you asked about, Dr Kaine, around why we would do this, there is a third dimension of this that is important, which is the need that universities have to ensure that students are fully informed as to what courses—this is courses, not subjects—are available for them to take. We felt, on the balance of all of those things, that it was necessary for us to indicate to prospective students that those courses may not be sustainable into the future. That was the basis of the temporary suspension of intakes which can, under our policy, be approved by management because it relates to the ongoing financial issues of the university.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: That comes to governance issues, which, again, I'll be examining in another forum. You did mention wellbeing and your concern for it, Professor Parfitt. I really do have to ask: Do you think that having a website suggesting that staff being subject to the scale of this change should have a cup of tea and wash their smalls is an appropriate way to deal with stress? You have probably been under stress yourself with all of this going on, Professor Parfitt. I wondered which of the suggestions on that list of 50 you might have engaged in and could suggest to staff as a way that they could calm themselves in this time of concern.

ANDREW PARFITT: I suspect that there are many ways in which people approach stressful circumstances. The resource to which you refer was not a resource that was put up specifically for the current circumstances that we're working under. It's part of a package of material. As I understand it, the intent of the material was to highlight the importance of routine in people's lives when they're going through change. I'm not a psychologist; I don't understand that necessarily.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: It didn't seem a bit tone deaf to you to have that—

ANDREW PARFITT: I might finish, Dr Kaine. We actually thought, along the lines that you're suggesting, that this may well be inappropriate, so we edited and appropriately reviewed the material. That material, as I indicated, is material that was generally available. It was not specifically available for operational sustainability.

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The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: I understand through the reporting—and I stand to be corrected—that that information was provided by an external organisation that is contracted. I wondered if you could give me details of how much they had been contracted for to provide those services.

ANDREW PARFITT: This is an ongoing service that's provided to the university, but we can certainly provide that information.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: That would be great. Very quickly, at the end, I wanted to consider the KPMG engagement. I'm happy for you to take these questions on notice. Whose idea was it to engage KPMG? Was there a competitive tender process? Can you tell me who within the chancellery and on the UTS Council has existing or previous relationships with KPMG, including having been partners?

ANDREW PARFITT: The answer as to how they were selected is that it was a competitive process. The answers to the others, I'm not sure. I think there was a general conclusion that some level of both capacity and scrutiny was necessary to obtain, so the decision was to make it a competitive process and obtain some assistance. I'd stress that it is assistance. We take full responsibility for decisions and recommendations that we make. In relation to prior relationships with KPMG, I'll have to take that on notice. I don't believe that there are any.

The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE: I think you have a director of government and external relations who was a partner before she commenced at UTS.

ANDREW PARFITT: I'll take that on notice.

The CHAIR: That concludes our session for today. Thank you very much for coming along and answering our questions. To the extent that there were questions taken on notice or any forthcoming supplementary questions, the Committee secretariat will be in touch. That concludes our hearing today.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee proceeded to deliberate.