

# **PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 – EDUCATION**

**Thursday 12 March 2026**

**Examination of proposed expenditure for the portfolio area**

## **SKILLS, TAFE AND TERTIARY EDUCATION**

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**The Committee met at 9:15.**

### **MEMBERS**

Ms Abigail Boyd(Chair)  
The Hon. Mark Buttigieg  
The Hon. Susan Carter  
The Hon. Anthony D'Adam  
The Hon. Dr Sarah Kaine  
The Hon. Rachel Merton (Deputy Chair)  
The Hon. Tania Mihailuk

### **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 additional round of hearings for 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. My name is Abigail Boyd. I am the 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. Thank you for making the time to give evidence—for some of you, two days in a row. Minister, I remind you that you do not need to be sworn as you have already sworn an oath to your office as a member of Parliament. Ms Le Bron, as you have not yet appeared before this Committee for budget estimates, you will need to be sworn. For all other witnesses, I remind you that you have already been sworn before this Committee during this inquiry and therefore do not need to be sworn again.

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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 Department of Education, on former affirmation

**Ms CHLOE READ**, Managing Director, TAFE NSW, on former affirmation

**Ms KERRY MEREDITH-SOTIRIS**, Executive Director, Course Development and Quality, TAFE NSW, on former affirmation

**Ms JULIE TICKLE**, Chief People Officer, TAFE NSW, on former affirmation

**Mr MARK HAWKINS**, Acting Chief Learning and Teaching Officer, TAFE NSW, on former affirmation

**Ms SUSANNAH LE BRON**, Chief Operating Officer, TAFE NSW, affirmed and examined

**Ms FIONA RANKIN**, Chief Information Officer, TAFE NSW, on former affirmation

**Ms REBECCA McPHEE**, Deputy Secretary, Investment NSW, Premier's Department, on former affirmation

**The CHAIR:** Today's hearing will be conducted from 9.15 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We're joined by the Minister for the morning session from 9.15 a.m. to 1.00 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 11.00 a.m. In the afternoon we'll hear from departmental witnesses from 2.00 p.m. to 3.30 p.m., followed by a 15-minute break. From 3.45 p.m. until 5.30 p.m. we will then hear from our university witnesses. During these sessions, there will be questions from the Opposition and crossbench members only, and then 15 minutes allocated for Government questions at 10.45 a.m., 12.45 p.m. and 5.15 p.m. We will begin with questions from the crossbench.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Good morning, Minister. Can I just start with asking you specifically about whether you keep any data about the number of instances of antisemitic behaviour or incidents across TAFE NSW?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Just in TAFE?

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Yes, I'd specifically like to ask about TAFE.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Can I start by thanking the Chair and the Committee for moving my hearing date so that I could actually make it—I appreciate that very much.

**The CHAIR:** You're welcome.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** TAFE NSW has a very strong policy when it comes to its campuses and to behaviour on its campuses. In terms of any specific data about complaints, I haven't had any that have been drawn to my attention—instances of racism or antisemitism that have been directly drawn to my attention. I ask the managing director if she has specific information on that.

**CHLOE READ:** We don't capture antisemitism specifically as a category under our complaints management system. In 2025 we do have 43 recorded complaints that were lodged by students that are related to racism. That is about 1.6 per cent of total complaints. We have three recorded complaints—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Do you investigate what those complaints are, the 43? Do you know what they relate to, specifically?

**CHLOE READ:** We will investigate all complaints, but I wouldn't have the specifics of the 43 with me today.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Can you provide the Committee a breakdown of what those 43 complaints relate to? I don't need the specifics.

**CHLOE READ:** Yes. They are about racism, but we could definitely get some specifics for you on notice.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I would like to know how many relate to antisemitic incidents.

**CHLOE READ:** We will definitely do what we can. Obviously what happens is, if they're classified as racism, they might also have "discrimination" or those kinds of words in them, so they may or may not specifically call out antisemitism, but we can certainly take on notice a breakdown.

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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, do you know of any students that might have been suspended or expelled from a TAFE in relation to any antisemitic behaviour?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, I've had no cases drawn to my attention. Ms Read can confirm that.

**CHLOE READ:** Yes, I can. There have been a couple of matters in terms of staff conduct related to the integrity unit, and we do have some breakdown of those student complaints. None of those have resulted in someone being removed from campus.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Sorry, so these are students raising concerns about staff?

**CHLOE READ:** No. There's complaints about staff and then there's complaints from students. Staff could complain about other members of staff, or students could complain about other students or about staff.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** In this respect, are you referring to antisemitic incidents there, or are you are saying there is a broad reason?

**CHLOE READ:** In terms of the information I have in front of me, anything that we know that relates to antisemitism, we have not expelled anyone from campus or taken any measures such as those.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Have you kept a record of how many protests that you've had in the last 12 months across TAFE campuses?

**CHLOE READ:** I'm not aware of any protests.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'm not aware of any protests on a TAFE campus.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, were you invited to make a submission into, or did you look into making a submission into, the parliamentary inquiry into antisemitism? Were any of your agencies invited to do that?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** To the Federal parliamentary inquiry?

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** No, our State one that we had here. Were you asked to provide any information?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I don't believe we made—the Education department, we may have. I'll pass over to the secretary.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We weren't asked to come and give evidence. I think we answered this yesterday.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Yes, I know what you answered yesterday. I just wanted to know what TAFE, specifically, was doing. I'll come back to that a bit later. I might move on to another issue I want to raise with you, which is to do with skills. Specifically, some of the reports—I just want to make sure that some progress has been made. Specifically, I want to look at the *NSW Skills Plan 2024-28*. I note you released an implementation early progress report for 2025. I just want to ask you to confirm the following: You issued an interim skills outcomes framework in 2024. Has a permanent skills outcomes framework been delivered?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We're in the process. The *NSW Skills Plan 2024-28* is a really strong reform agenda for the skills system, and we have been focusing on several key areas in that: funding for priority skills, a strong and stable TAFE, planning for local skills. We've had a number of areas where we have made very substantial progress on that. We have launched a skills outcomes framework which establishes system-level monitoring and accountability of performance across key measures of success in the skills system.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I think you only issued an interim one, is that right?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I believe we've issued the actual framework.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We have issued the actual framework.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** So you have the final government skills framework?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, it's titled the NSW Skills Outcomes Framework.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We have also been delivering progress reports on the Skills Plan, and we have stakeholder reference groups which are looking at the progress that we are making as well. As part of that, we have gone through a number of actions, including removing TAFE from the Smart and Skilled system, modernising the apprenticeship and traineeship system, and reforming pricing and fees. One of the really

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important ones, I think, is piloting a new regional skills planning model to try and ensure that we are responding to the needs in regional communities better.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** On the website, it still says "interim". Does that just need to be clarified on the website, why you've still got only the interim framework?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Can I ask the department to clarify that?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** We're in the process of finalising that outcomes framework.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** So finally we can get the right answer.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** Just to clarify, we're having a final discussion with the NSW Skills Board in coming weeks about the finalisation of that framework. We don't expect significant changes, though, beyond what the Minister has just taken you through.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** When do you expect that to be finalised? It's been a year and four months, so when do you think you'll have it publicly available?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** That will be a decision of government in relation to timing of that release. But, as I said, we're going to be talking about it with our Skills Board next week.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Is this decision by the Minister or the Cabinet? Minister, is that what that means?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** A decision by me, I believe.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** A decision by the Minister.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Can you give me an answer on when you're finally going to release the Government's skills outcome framework?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'm quite happy with the framework as it stands at the moment.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** It's only an interim one.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I don't expect to see many changes to that. But we will be reporting on that. We've also been reporting on outcomes on the plan. It is a plan which runs for a number of years, so we would expect to see that the elements in the plan will take some years to achieve. But it's the first plan we've had in the State in more than 15 years for skills, so I think it's a significant thing to have put in place and a significant achievement as part of our commitment to delivering the skills that New South Wales needs for the future.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, can I ask you a couple of questions about digital and cybersecurity. It's also part of the *NSW Skills Plan 2024-28* and is a critical skills area. I just want to understand the involvements in some of these courses. You might need to take it on notice, but I'm interested to know about certificates III and IV in information technology, and also Certificate IV in Information Technology (Systems Administration Support), Certificate IV in Information Technology (Programming) and Certificate IV in Cyber Security. So there are five different certificates. I want to understand if you have any data or information in relation to what the enrolments are for these courses.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** As a broad comment to start with, the IAT Digital is leading the way in some of this digital and cyber work. We've got the full courses, like the certificates you're talking about. We're also offering a range of microskills and short courses, which have got incredibly good enrolments. I'll ask Ms Read to give me the figure in a second, because there are hundreds of thousands of enrolments in those courses and completions.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Hundreds and thousands, yes?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Not in the ones you're talking about. In the short courses. In the certificates that you're talking about—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** So in which courses are there hundreds and thousands?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** In the courses we're offering through the IAT Digital. The IAT Digital is leading the way in some of this work with industry and with universities in developing the courses that deal directly with this. For instance, I've been to the graduation class of the Microsoft Datacentre Academy, where we're taking people from different careers through.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Because it's a critical part of your Skills Plan.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes, it is. You're exactly right.

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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** That's why I want to understand how that's travelling.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** There's some very exciting activity taking place. Ms Read may have the figures available on some of those enrolments, and we can certainly take some of the ones about the certificate courses on notice.

**CHLOE READ:** Yes, for sure. As the Minister said, the Institute of Applied Technology Digital at Meadowbank offers a range of courses. Rather than sitting in the traditional nationally recognised courses, like the certificate III and IV, they're both micro-credentials and microskills—so shorter courses. The micro-credentials are over about a six-week period. We've had significant uptake of both. We've got nine microskills and 64 micro-credentials, as well as others in development. We've had over 400,000 enrolments in the micro-credentials and microskills since November of 2022. So a really significant uptake in those courses, which are good for people who work in a different industry who might need some cyber awareness or some digital uplift, or people who work in the technology and digital sector who might need specific, more targeted or expert knowledge.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, I've got some questions in relation to the \$51 million contract that TAFE NSW signed with MA Services Group. I understand if you want to hand these over to perhaps Ms Read as we go through the details. The contract was signed on 1 November 2024 for the provision of security services to TAFE NSW for an initial term of three years with two 12-month extension options. The contract value disclosed represents that full five-year contract life. Can you tell me what the status of that contract is now?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** As you're probably aware, TAFE NSW is required to use whole-of-government contracts for things like security services. MA Services were put on the integrated security panel by the previous Government in February 2021. Them being on the panel is something that the Minister for Regional New South Wales handles, as I understand it. TAFE has now changed to Citiguard Protection Services. They were engaged to provide security services commencing 23 December as an emergency solution because MA Services Group had allegations made against them and went broke—went into voluntary administration—as you're probably aware. So TAFE NSW has been working with Citiguard to make sure that we are getting what we need in security services. I would ask Ms Read to elaborate on the specifics.

**CHLOE READ:** As the Minister covered, because MA Services have entered voluntary administration, we've switched to a different provider. We've issued a letter of termination to MA Services Group for that contract. But there's a 20 business day period, I think, in the legal specifics of that contract, so we would expect to finalise on 17 March.<sup>1</sup>

**The CHAIR:** With Citiguard?

**CHLOE READ:** No. That's the termination of MA Services.

**The CHAIR:** From the 17th?

**CHLOE READ:** It will be in effect from 17 March, because there's a waiting period of 20 business days once you issue a letter of termination for any response. Obviously, given that MA Services are in voluntary administration, we wouldn't be expecting any response. But, obviously, we've got to honour the legal framework in which that contract sits.<sup>2</sup>

**The CHAIR:** When did you send the letter of termination?

**CHLOE READ:** On 27 February.

**The CHAIR:** So it wasn't until 27 February, but they went into administration on—

**CHLOE READ:** On 23 December.

**The CHAIR:** I'm struggling to understand, because there were really significant allegations made against MA Services Group in October/November last year. From what I understand, it was a pretty poorly kept secret that there were underpayments and exploitation of staff going on before that. Despite that, TAFE only sent that letter of termination on 27 February. Why the delay?

**CHLOE READ:** There are two separate things here, I think. We became aware of the allegations in November. We sought a response from MA Services Group. We also raised that issue with Public Works because,

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<sup>1</sup> In [correspondence](#) to the committee dated 1 April 2026, by Ms Chloe Read, Managing Director, TAFE NSW, clarified their evidence.

<sup>2</sup> See above.

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as you know, they're part of the whole-of-government contract, which is managed by them. They committed also to undertake an investigation. Obviously, at that time, we have to go through a due process of saying, "We've received this information. Can you respond to that?" In the meantime, essentially MA Services have gone into administration. That was two days before Christmas. We focused quickly on making sure we had alternate provision for security services, because obviously we have some of those services over the TAFE holidays. So we needed to make sure we had that. Then we needed to spend a short amount of time getting legal advice on how we now terminate this arrangement with them, and that accounts for the delay between them going into administration and us issuing that letter.

**The CHAIR:** Once those really serious allegations came to light last year, what due diligence did TAFE do around that contract or workplace conditions at that time?

**CHLOE READ:** Let me just find the right part in my notes. I think I've gone past it. We asked MA Services for a response on those allegations. Then, as I said, we also went to Public Works, who managed that whole-of-government arrangement, who were going to undertake an investigation on our behalf.

**The CHAIR:** The investigation that Public Works was going to do, was that going to involve actually going to TAFE campuses and checking on these individuals to make sure that they weren't being exploited and taken advantage of?

**CHLOE READ:** I don't have details of their investigation with me, but I can certainly take that on notice and find out anything extra on that.

**The CHAIR:** But TAFE NSW didn't think that there was anything extra it needed to do?

**CHLOE READ:** We did seek a response from MA Services.

**The CHAIR:** And what was the response?

**CHLOE READ:** That's a good question.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** They went broke.

**CHLOE READ:** I suspect we either got one that denied the allegations or they went broke. I'll need to take that on notice. Apologies. It is somewhere in my notes.

**The CHAIR:** When was that opportunity given to MA Services Group—so this is in November that you asked it for an explanation?

**CHLOE READ:** We became aware of the allegations via the media on 27 November, according to my notes. I can find out the date that we wrote to them or corresponded with them on the allegations.

**The CHAIR:** How long did you give them to respond?

**CHLOE READ:** I'll have to find that out for you.

**The CHAIR:** These serious allegations come to light, then on 27 November or around that time you write to MA Services and ask them about those allegations, but it is not until 23 December where they going into administration gives you an opportunity to then change contracts. But technically we still have a contract on foot with MA Services at this point, and it won't be actually terminated until 17 March.

**CHLOE READ:** I am not sure of the legal terminology, because we've issued a notice of termination, so I'm not sure if that's considered an active contract. I can find that out but, yes, that's—broadly speaking—correct.

**The CHAIR:** How many other suppliers on the panel were invited to quote or tender for TAFE NSW's security needs and why was MA Services selected—on what criteria?

**CHLOE READ:** I don't know if I have that with me. This was 2021—I might need to take that on notice.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We might have to take that on notice. They were on the panel for some years and certainly prior to Ms Read taking over as managing director, so we may need to take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** I understand it was a limited tender. The tender document that was uploaded onto the government site does not explain on what basis—under "evaluation criteria and weighting" there's just nothing. There's no explanation of why they were appointed, in particular. Did we pay for their services up-front? Are we now a creditor in that administration?

**CHLOE READ:** I'd need to take that on notice—yes, I'll take that on notice.



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**The CHAIR:** At the time of awarding the contract, did TAFE NSW assess whether the rates quoted by MA Services were sufficient to lawfully employ security guards at the applicable award rates, including superannuation, penalty rates and leave entitlements?

**CHLOE READ:** I will also take that on notice. I'm not sure if we manage the part with the rates or whether that's part of the whole-of-government arrangement, but I will find out.

**The CHAIR:** Did TAFE NSW conduct any independent probity or integrity checks on MA Services Group, its director, Micky Ahuja, or its subcontracting arrangements beyond the minimum requirements of the whole-of-government panel?

**CHLOE READ:** Again I'll take that on notice for the part where we engaged them.

**The CHAIR:** Specifically, were any checks made of ASIC records, litigation history, ATO compliance or links to organised crime that would have, presumably, raised red flags?

**CHLOE READ:** I believe that those sorts of checks are part of the whole-of-government arrangements but, again, I can clarify that for you.

**The CHAIR:** What due diligence obligations does the New South Wales Government Procurement Policy Framework impose on agencies procuring security services? Can TAFE NSW confirm they discharged each of those obligations in full?

**CHLOE READ:** I don't have that information with me, but one of the obligations we have is to use the whole-of-government contract because of the due diligence that is done on behalf of all agencies for that panel. I'll take on notice the specifics of the policy and whether there is either mandatory or guidance given on particular checks that agencies should still conduct above and beyond those from the whole-of-government.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I think the core part of having a whole-of-government contract is that Public Works does a lot of that work for our agencies so that we shouldn't have to double up on doing that work. In this case, obviously, this organisation has proven to be not great. But I don't know that TAFE could be expected to duplicate the work that Public Works should have done.

**The CHAIR:** I'll come back to this in the next round.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Good morning, Minister.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Good morning.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Good news about the enrolments in the micro-credentials in the IADT—is it a similar success story for micro-credential courses in construction?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The IAT Construction is going quite well. We are working with the Federal Government at the moment with a view to doing a bit more work on the IAT Construction to bring it in line really with the work that we are doing in our Manufacturing Centres of Excellence. One of the reasons we are doing that is we'd like to see it being a bit more responsive to the modern methods of construction, and to be a bit more engaged with industry in that area. Yes, it's doing some fantastic work at the IAT Construction but—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Can you quantify how well it is—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes, I can. I just thought I'd give that outline.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** —compared to technology courses?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We'd have to come back to you with the figures, I think, on the micro-credentials and things.

**CHLOE READ:** I have them.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** You have them? Okay.

**CHLOE READ:** If I might help there, IAT—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Now I've got them: 47,000 enrols in construction micro-credentials and microskills since November 2022.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sorry, that's 47,000 compared to 400,000?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes, a different sort of industry, though, if you think about it. When you look at the IAT Digital—

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**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** If we're thinking about need in the workplace, though, isn't construction an area of great need? There's, what, 10 per cent of people in the construction courses compared to the technology courses—are my figures right?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It's a very different—and I will let Ms Read come back on this, but it's a very different area. If you think about the IAT Digital, for instance, if you wanted to do any job unrelated to the digital or wanted to learn a bit about how artificial intelligence might influence your workplace in the future, there'd be a microskill for you to do that, whereas people who are doing the microskills in construction are directly working in an industry. But Ms Read might have—

**CHLOE READ:** Yes, I think that's—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Just before you, Ms Read, I just want to clarify so I've got what the Minister said straight. The microskills in construction are directly related to workforce, whereas the microskills in technology could be workforce or could be general interest or general personal development?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Well, I'd suggest that every government department in New South Wales should be doing the microskills on artificial intelligence through our IAT Digital. I think that would be very useful for them to have their employees doing that—and, in fact, all of us—so that we understand where that's going and how it might be used. I do think there is a broader application but, as I said, we do think there is work to do in the IAT Construction to actually boost it up to make it a real leader in modern construction methods and those sorts of areas.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Has that work started?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We are working with the Commonwealth on that at the moment.

**CHLOE READ:** Yes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sorry, does that mean the work has started or you're just in a discussion phase, preliminarily to work starting?

**CHLOE READ:** I'd say the work starting—yes.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Watch this space for—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** So it's preliminarily—thank you very much. Minister, you have made big announcements in relation to funding and fee-free TAFE places. How many of the fee-free TAFE places are for certificate III trade qualifications?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** What we've seen in the transition between a lot of the courses which were being offered during the pandemic and following, for example, to now is that there has been a big shift in that fee-free from quite short courses—microskills, those sorts of things—things like there were huge enrolments for a while in the handwashing courses at TAFE, for obvious reasons, during that. So what we've actually seen—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sorry, Minister, I'm just asking about how many of the fee-free places are for certificate III trade qualifications.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I need to give you the context of this because—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Happy with just a figure, Minister.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** —what we've seen is that we have shifted a lot of the fee-free funding, and the fee-free funding from the Commonwealth has changed quite a bit. So we've directed that into the priority areas on our Skills Plan, the areas that are on the skills list which are in high demand in the economy. We can provide you with fee-free—and, of course, in New South Wales, New South Wales government funding makes all apprenticeships and traineeships fee-free. So they're all fee-free. But Commonwealth fee-free funding goes to assist us with areas like the fee-free funding agreement for construction. So we've got fee-free enrolments for an additional 39 full qualifications relating to the construction and housing sector. Of those, 4,000 are fee-free apprenticeship places and 1,600 pre-apprenticeship places. I note that is in addition to people doing full trade qualifications. I can take on notice for you the figures that will be from the department about—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Thank you. That'll be very helpful.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** —the number of full qualifications that have been funded through fee-free, through a combination of State and Federal funding.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Is it possible to separate which ones are funded by State and which are funded by Federal?

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**JEREMY KURUCZ:** We'll see what we can do for you, Ms Carter.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Thank you very much. Of the students who are enrolled in fee-free places, what's the completion rate?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll get the department to answer you the completion rate on fee-free places, but I just want to give a bit of a context to this because, overall, there is—and I want to acknowledge this—a lot of work to do in improving completions in apprenticeships. New South Wales is slightly ahead of the rest of Australia on the last figures. Figures bounce around a bit, of course. It's only just over half the people who start an apprenticeship who actually complete it—around 53 per cent or 54 per cent.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Can I stop you there just to clarify. You're saying of the students who commence TAFE qualifications for an apprenticeship, only half of those complete?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It's apprenticeship qualifications overall, because it's not just TAFE. Remember there are private providers in this as well.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Of people who enrol in TAFE trade qualifications, what's that completion rate?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** There's a separate figure on that. I'll ask the department.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** I'll have to take the specific trade completion rate on notice but, for apprenticeships generally, the latest data that we have is for apprentices that commenced in 2020, because we generally allow around four to five years to actually assess what that completion rate is. That completion rate was around 50.3 per cent. That's 3.4 per cent higher than the national average, and it is a slight increase compared to those who commenced in 2019. We are seeing an upward trend. That's also the feedback that TAFE and other providers give us anecdotally, that they're seeing more people complete. But it is, as the Minister said, around half of those who are commencing that are completing

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'd love to be able to talk you through the reasons why we're seeing that happening.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I am going to come to that, but do you have figures or do you collect figures for completion rates with private providers and completion rates for TAFE students?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes, we do.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Do you have those figures?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** I don't have them before me now. We can take that on notice.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What work is TAFE engaged in to boost the completion rate?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** In the skills system overall—the department—we're working on completions. We've done a couple of things with the Federal Government recently to get some additional funding, for instance, for the VTAS scheme, which is the scheme that provides funding assistance for regional apprentices to travel to their training. A 60 per cent increase, I think, in the per kilometre—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Just on that issue of regional apprentices, how many regional apprentices would have to travel over 50 kilometres to be able to access their training?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** There'd be quite a number. Our VTAS kicks in at 110—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Can we quantify that, Minister?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Can we come back to that, but can I just run through the rest of the work on completions, as the question you asked?

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** If we could just talk about each issue as we go, I think it's more useful. We can really understand it then. How many regional apprentices have to travel more than 50 kilometres to access their training?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I think that's a question we'd need to take on notice, because it's obviously dependent on where people live.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** You said the VTAS. What are the VTAS criteria? When do they kick in?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** A 110-kilometre trip for an apprentice.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** How long does it take the average apprentice to travel for 110 kilometres?

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**CORRECTED**

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**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We really need to come into some context on this. Let's have a think about how this works in regional New South Wales. Regional apprentices generally, if they need to travel this sort of distance for their apprenticeship, will do block release. They will go to TAFE or a training provider in a centre. They will do a week of block release instead of just doing a day a week at their local TAFE or training provider.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** In that block release, how do they organise accommodation?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We provide them with a subsidy for accommodation and we provide them with a per-kilometre subsidy for their travel, which helps them with their costs. It doesn't cover the whole cost and, as we all know, accommodation costs in regional areas are quite high now. In some cases, some employers will also assist their apprentice with that, but that's often up to the award and the agreement that they're on. We do our best in regional areas. I come from a regional area, as you know. One of the reasons why I was very keen to see some of this Federal funding going to increase that amount is because I was aware that it had not increased for a considerable length of time and that cost pressure was forcing apprentices to feel like they needed to give up. That's in regional areas.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** In terms of—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** That's just one element—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sorry, if we could just—

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order: It's an interesting line of questioning from Ms Carter, but there does seem to be a bit of a pattern now of interrupting the Minister when he is trying to get out relevant information. I wonder if we could just let him finish.

**The CHAIR:** I uphold the point of order. There has been a bit of that.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** With respect, Minister, if we could perhaps have a conversation rather than a large dump of information from you that we then have to drill down into, it's going to be more productive.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It's kind of hard in a question and answer estimates session. I'll have a conversation with you if you want, individually, later. I'd be very happy to.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** A conversation is an exchange of information, Minister, which is what we're aiming for here. If I could ask you a specific question, Minister—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Let me just briefly outline some of the other things that influence completions. Those cost pressures in regional areas are obviously a key point. We've been working with the Commonwealth on that. We're also very conscious of the fact that apprentices who get more contact in their first year, so that they know somebody to talk to about any issues that they've got, are more likely to complete. That's something which we've been talking to the Commonwealth about as well and something that we're focusing on in our response. We've just done a review of the Apprenticeship and Traineeship Act, which has had 9,000 submissions to our review and which has highlighted a number of those things that we need to be focusing on to improve that completion rate. I just want to let you know that the Government and I are very focused on improving that completion rate over time, because we recognise that Australia's birth rate and school completions mean that there's not a huge number of people who are coming out of school who aren't doing some sort of further work. Obviously, we need to access those ones that aren't, but then we need to make sure we're not losing that initial training that we're doing with people as they come on and that we improve that completion rate.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Minister, you talked about the importance of contact in the first year and the correlation between that and completion. You said you were talking to the Federal Government about that. In concrete terms, what are you currently engaged in now to increase contact in the first year?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The skills section of the Department of Education has responsibility for making sure that we are in touch, in some circumstances, with the apprentices. But there's a bit of a split responsibility because the apprentice network providers from the Commonwealth also have a responsibility in that space. We know that in some areas it's done really well. Group training companies—GTOs—seem to do the job quite well. We have a 90 per cent completion rate in the Government's 1,000 apprentices and traineeship program. That's a phenomenally good completion rate, and that's because they're in workplace environments where they're getting that sort of support, largely.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** When did that program start?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The 1,000 apprentices and traineeship program was a commitment that Labor made at the last election.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Has it been running long enough, according to Mr Kurucz's figures, to be able to judge a completion rate yet?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It has in the case of traineeships, because traineeships are a much shorter length of time.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I thought we were just told that we needed to let things run for about four years to get a completion rate, and you're telling us now we've got a completion rate of this program. I don't understand how we're comparing apples with apples.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** When you look at the two components of it, there are apprentices and trainees. Traineeships are a shorter program. The traineeships component of the program—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** So we've got a traineeship completion rate but we don't have an apprenticeship completion rate yet?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll ask the department to elaborate on the figure.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Mr Kurucz might add to it but the retention rate in the program is 91.5 per cent.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But retention is different to completion, isn't it?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** The Minister is right around traineeships. The apprenticeship part won't have been completed, but we're finding really strong retention at 91.5 per cent.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But retention isn't completion, is it?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It's a bloody good indication that you're going to get there.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I agree, but what we really want to know is for how many people is enrolling in TAFE actually helping them build the skills that they need to build their lives and that Australia needs to build our future, and that's completion rates, isn't it, Minister?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** In part, it is completion rates, yes, and—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** And if we've only got 50 per cent completing, don't we have a real problem we have to look at?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We certainly have a situation that we inherited from the previous Government where we'd seen a massive drop in the number of people doing apprenticeships—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** This tiny violin again. Aren't we past this now?

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** —and we certainly have seen a situation where we weren't valuing those skills.

**The CHAIR:** Order! I need to hear the point of order.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** We are early into the pattern of not only interrupting the Minister when he's answering but now offering some kind of odd commentary on the answers as they're given. I ask that you call the member to cease doing that.

**The CHAIR:** I think it's all right for now, but I will remind all members it's quite early in the day. We've got a lot of time. Let's try and proceed in a more orderly manner.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Minister, you're familiar with the TEQSA philosophy about higher education enrolments?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Do you want to be specific about your question?

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Essentially, the TEQSA philosophy is that, in terms of entry requirements and support provided to students, students really shouldn't be being enrolled in courses unless there's a reasonable prospect that they're going to graduate. I don't think anybody would think that a 50 per cent graduation rate from an enrolment in a TAFE course is a reasonable prospect. I'm just wondering what the TAFE philosophy is and how that compares to TEQSA, and whether there's any attempt to align those two.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Can I again just say to you that it's TAFE—a very important part of it—but it's also private training providers and it's employers taking people on. I absolutely would agree that we want to make sure that people understand the industry that they're getting into and that they're suited for it. That's one of the reasons why we've been expanding the Educational Pathways Program. The Educational Pathways Program, along with programs like RIEP, take into the high schools the industry collaboration and give the kids a taster of those

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**CORRECTED**

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programs. They give them experience and offer them opportunities to potentially do SBATs or programs like that, so that they're getting an early idea of whether or not the industry is going to suit. That's one of the very important parts of our strategy to actually increase enrolments.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Do you have data that demonstrates the impact of that on completion rates?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We know that in schools where the EPP is operating, we're getting a significant increase in the number of young people who are going on and doing vocational qualifications.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Do we have data about the completion rates of those young people?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** In those 183 New South Wales public high schools across 11 regions with the Educational Pathways Program, Ms Carter, we've seen a 30 per cent increase in school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Do we have data about the completion of those school-based apprenticeships?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I don't have that in front of me, but—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Are you able to provide that on notice?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'll see what I've got, yes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Does that mean you can?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** If I have that data, I'm happy to provide it on notice.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Why would we not have the data about completion? If this is one of the things that we're doing to help student engagement, and to maintain student engagement and help completion, why don't we have data about completion?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** That program commenced in 2020 and so the first lot of school-based apprentices would be coming to an end. Let me see what data we have and take that on notice and come back to you. But I can tell you, having engaged with those high school principals with that program, they are very grateful for the \$38 million ongoing commitment, because their careers advisers, transition advisers and support teams are reporting to me as secretary that the opportunities for their students through school-based apprenticeships and traineeships and support has really grown. Let me get you the completions.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** With respect to completions generally, do we have figures about the percentage rate of completions in the metropolitan area as compared to the regional areas?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** For that particular—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** For completions across TAFE generally.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** For completions in apprenticeships, do you want to define it as?

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Yes, all right, completions in apprenticeships.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We can take that on notice.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** And any trade qualifications. Do we have data on the completion rate for Smart and Skilled funded training by qualification level?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** Apologies, could I just clarify, Ms Carter, are you referencing private providers? Because Smart and Skilled, historically, has funded TAFE and non-TAFE private providers.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Until recently.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Can we have both?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** Yes, sure.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Which qualifications have the lowest completion rate?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Can I ask the department to answer that?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We might have to take that on notice as well.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We might have to take that on notice and find that one out.

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**CORRECTED**

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**JEREMY KURUCZ:** Yes. It has generally been, Ms Carter—the qualifications with the lowest completion rates have generally been those that don't necessarily align strongly to an employment outcome. So they're the ones that generally might be a Certificate III in Project Management, where a student might actually be enrolling in a course to do a couple of units of competencies or some of the actual training modules within that, and they never have an intent to actually complete the full qualification. That may be the reason why a particular qualification—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** And micro-credentialing would address that issue, wouldn't it—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It does, to an extent.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** —if people can pick up those competencies individually?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** In some parts.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** In some cases, yes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Is this an area that we should be looking at to make sure that those competencies are available as micro-credentials?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes, it is, actually. It's something which has been being looked at in terms of skills passports and those sort of things, to try and—stackable skills credentials.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Where are we with that work?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The Commonwealth has that at the moment.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Do we have any role in that, or it's all the Commonwealth?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We do, through skills Ministers and through our department's engagement.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What work are we doing on it?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Interestingly, New South Wales did do quite a lot of work on it, and we handed over all our IP when the Commonwealth said they wanted to do a national one. We handed it over to them to take it on and develop it further.

**The CHAIR:** Can we come back to MA Services Group.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Sure.

**The CHAIR:** Just confirming, did TAFE NSW, at any time, request or receive payroll records, pay slips, superannuation contribution statements or other evidence demonstrating that guards working at TAFE campuses were being paid their lawful entitlements?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will have to ask Ms Read.

**CHLOE READ:** I will have to take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Also, were any audits or compliance checks conducted during the life of the contract to verify that security personnel at TAFE NSW sites were being directly employed by MA Services, or did TAFE NSW know or suspect that guards were being supplied through subcontractors, labour hire intermediaries or related entities such as Auswide Management Solutions, RMK Management Services or LSS?

**CHLOE READ:** There's a couple of parts in that question. We would review and engage with contract providers on a regular basis. Whether those audits went specifically to those things, I would need to take on notice. I would flag that subcontracting is permitted under the whole-of-government contract, and so there would be some instances in which that was occurring, but I couldn't speak to those specific companies. I will take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Perhaps if you could, and also to let me know what the arrangements were in relation to whether or not TAFE NSW was required to approve the subcontracting or whether that could be done under the terms of the contract. Did TAFE NSW receive any complaints, reports or intelligence from unions, individual workers, industry bodies, regulators or other government agencies raising concerns about MA Services' labour practices, their tax compliance or their corporate integrity at any point during the contract?

**CHLOE READ:** I'll take that on notice too.

**The CHAIR:** I think we've covered the exact time at which you found out about the allegations. It was published from at least November 2025, when media investigations into MA Services began. Did you say, before, 27 November? Was that the date that you gave me?

**CHLOE READ:** That's the date that I have for us being aware of those allegations, through media reports.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The CHAIR:** The United Workers Union publicly warned the Victorian Government about MA Services' probity risk before the company's collapse. Did the UWU or any other union make similar representations to TAFE NSW?

**CHLOE READ:** Not that I'm aware of. That might be a question for Public Works, because they have the whole-of-government arrangement.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, but the question is whether it came to you as a—

**CHLOE READ:** I'm not aware of any, but I'll check. I'll confirm that for you.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The overall ones might be a question for Minister Moriarty, in terms of the overall, whole-of-government elements of that.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. I'm very interested in what TAFE did, though. Under the Public Works and Procurement Act, government agencies must take reasonable steps to ensure that goods and services procured by and for the agency are not the product of modern slavery. What specific reasonable steps did TAFE NSW take in relation to MA Services' contract?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I think Ms Read might have to take that on notice.

**CHLOE READ:** Yes.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Essentially, it will come out of the previous questions you've asked there.

**CHLOE READ:** And I think, again, the whole-of-government arrangements include those provisions on ensuring adherence to the New South Wales procurement, the Fair Work requirements and the Modern Slavery Act, so we might need to consult Public Works on that too.

**The CHAIR:** You're required to report annually on the reasonable steps taken to ensure goods and services are not the product of modern slavery. In each annual report published during the life of the MA Services contract, what did TAFE NSW disclose in its modern slavery reporting section about its security guarding contract?

**CHLOE READ:** I'll need to check the annual report for that.

**The CHAIR:** I suspect that there isn't anything in there. Did TAFE, at any point, identify security services as a high-risk procurement category?

**CHLOE READ:** I think they were—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We are obliged to take the whole-of-government contracts, or a provider that's on those lists, as part of the arrangements in government, so the questions on this really need to be directed to the Minister for Regional New South Wales about the work that Public Works did in checking those things and providing TAFE with a list.

**The CHAIR:** It's a little bit buck-passing, though, isn't it, when TAFE itself—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Possibly, although—

**The CHAIR:** When TAFE itself has the obligation to ensure for itself, with all of the operational knowledge it has of how these things play out in practice?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** There's a question there about—you have a whole-of-government contracting arrangement so that individual agencies can save cost in the way that they go about it and don't have to go through a lot of those processes. In this case I certainly take your point about the obvious flaws that this contractor had, but they're not something that TAFE NSW was directly responsible for.

**The CHAIR:** That's interesting because TAFE has reported specifically on cleaning services reform in the latest annual report as a modern slavery action. It says:

**Cleaning Services Reform:** TAFE NSW is actively participating in the NSW Government's reform of cleaning services. The Department of Education, who are leading a Whole of Government approach, are developing a hybrid delivery model that combines in-house services with outsourcing. This initiative is designed to reduce modern slavery risks and improve oversight of working conditions for cleaners.

Won't you do the same for people working in security?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** As you'd be aware, we made an election commitment to review the cleaning because we were getting concerns about outsourced cleaning services across schools and government facilities. The Government and the Ministers responsible for that have announced a process where we are starting to bring some services in house. While we didn't have specific issues around MA raised with me as Minister, certainly I get



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**CORRECTED**

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comments from our friends in the union movement around outsourcing. I know that the Government is very well aware of that and has an agenda, but it's not something you can do all in one go.

**The CHAIR:** But the Anti-slavery Commissioner has identified both cleaning and security as key modern slavery risks and notes that the Government brought some, as you say, outsourced school cleaning contracts back in house, in part to protect workers from risks of exploitation or slavery. Why was the same logic not applied to security sector contracts?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I think you probably need to ask the Ministers responsible for those contracts.

**The CHAIR:** Then let's look at TAFE security contracts prior to the MA Services Group. Were they with Southern Cross Group?

**CHLOE READ:** Yes, I believe that's correct.

**The CHAIR:** Southern Cross got done for illegally subcontracting security guards for COVID hotels under a New South Wales police contract, which was a clear red flag for there being exploitation of workers under subcontracting. That was the previous TAFE provider. I understand that contract was continuing, even though those issues came to light in 2021. That contract wasn't terminated until you brought MA Services Group in. Is that correct?

**CHLOE READ:** There's a relationship here again with the whole-of-government security panel. We used the whole-of-government panel in 2019 to set up arrangements under that contract and then in December 2021 there was a new panel established, which did not include Southern Cross Group. But I think the mechanisms of those panels and the rationale for change would be a matter for Public Works.

**The CHAIR:** In 2021 Southern Cross got their contract extended from a 2022 date to mid-2025, but then we have MA Services coming in in mid-2024. Were they brought in because of concerns with Southern Cross?

**CHLOE READ:** As I understand, it the whole-of-government arrangement changed.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, I think the initial contracts in this were issued by the former Government and by former managing directors at TAFE. I think it's probably reasonable for Ms Read to take some aspects of this on notice.

**The CHAIR:** I think the broader point here is that there are identified modern slavery risks. There's an entire industry that is quite reasonably seen as being higher risk for worker exploitation. I have heard all of the responses to these questions today but they all appear to be saying, "Well, if it's on the whole-of-government thing, it's fine. We don't need to worry about it." But you—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I don't have the power to sit here and change our overarching policies on those whole-of-government things. But I think what you've seen from the Government with the cleaning contracts is that there is a desire for us to try and deliver more in house, where possible. Obviously, that has pretty big implications in terms of the budgets that agencies need to be provided as well.

**The CHAIR:** But at what point do you look at this and say, "Actually, we should be checking on those workers"? It's a Labor government and under your watch—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Absolutely as a Labor government we should be making sure that people employed under any contract by government are paid appropriate rates and appropriate conditions.

**The CHAIR:** And not by just saying, "Well, that's someone else's problem," but by understanding the way that the security—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The difficulty is that it's not my agencies that are determining those overall contracts. The questions on the overall whole-of-government contracts need to be directed to the Minister who's responsible.

**The CHAIR:** You don't think that's buck-passing when it's you with the operational knowledge of how these security contracts are working in practice?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It's fair to say that TAFE, when these issues particularly with MA, as Ms Read has outlined—when these were raised in the media, they went back to Public Works and asked them to investigate them. So I think that does show that action was taken.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Chair, if this does help, with that whole-of-government procurement requirement, it is a mandatory requirement for those that submit a tender to address modern slavery. It actually says you will be asked—that is, the tenderer—to provide information about modern slavery risks in your business and any actions you've taken to address these. In that whole-of-government requirement, there is an onus on the tenderer to also demonstrate how they will address the heightened risk of modern slavery in that sector.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The CHAIR:** Yes. So clearly asking dodgy contractors whether or not they're dodgy is not necessarily good procurement practice.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I just wanted to stipulate what is in the whole-of-government requirement.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, following the Bondi terrorist attack, did TAFE NSW undertake any new security risk assessments across its campuses?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll ask Ms Read to answer specifics about it. Obviously, the Bondi terrorist attack was something which made all parts of our society think about the safety of people on their campuses and the need to respond to that. We saw that from government. Our TAFE campuses haven't had quite the same, I'm not sure what the right word is, but level of activity in this area. But I'll ask Ms Read to elaborate.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Can I perhaps ask my second question and that might clarify what I'm referring to. Minister, were any additional security measures implemented at TAFE campuses after that attack, such as increased security presence, surveillance or safety reviews?

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

**CHLOE READ:** In the wake of the Bondi attack, we did a range of things. Speaking specifically to your question, we did look at campuses and consider whether we needed additional security risk assessment, which was done across a range of campuses. I'll take on notice whether we adjusted settings specifically. We also did things like additional—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Can you take on notice just whatever detail you can give in relation to these security risk assessments? I appreciate you might not be able to give me all—

**CHLOE READ:** Additional signage and additional desktop signage to reinforce safety but also belonging at TAFE, as well as additional communication with students, support for staff, additional information in terms of training sessions for staff to deal with any incidences that they might have crop up in the classroom, and then also our mandatory training includes a module on—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** And this is all since the Bondi attack you've undertaken this? Or this is something you were already, in general, undertaking?

**CHLOE READ:** The last thing I was talking about is already, which is mandatory training that includes a module on diversity and inclusion. But the remainder of those things were as a result of the Bondi attack.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, does TAFE NSW have a framework to identify early signs of violent extremism or radicalisation among students on campus, on any of their campuses?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will have to ask Ms Read to answer specifics about it. We obviously have frameworks around our activity and expectations of staff and students and behaviour, but I'll ask Ms Read to specifically answer that if she can.

**CHLOE READ:** The answer to your question, if you are very specifically talking about a framework to identify radicalisation, I believe is no. But we do have student behaviour policies and expectations. We have risk assessments that can be conducted where students might be engaged in concerning behaviour. We have risk of violence assessments that are conducted as appropriate at the time of enrolment, and we have access to counselling services and mental health support. There's a set of things that would work together in a relatively similar way, but we don't have an explicit framework for identifying those.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, the national counter-terrorism and violent extremism strategy, *A Safer Australia – Australia's Counter-Terrorism and Violent Extremism Strategy 2025*, emphasises early intervention in identifying individuals vulnerable to radicalisation. How is TAFE NSW applying this guidance across its campuses?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll ask Ms Read to give a specific answer, but I think that the measures TAFE has just outlined show that we have a number of methods of identifying people who might be a risk overall and dealing with problematic behaviour. I suspect that many of those would meet those criteria, but I'll ask Ms Read to specifically respond on that.

**CHLOE READ:** Again, I think it's those pieces that we've talked about: student orientation, student induction, policies on behaviour, our work with student counsellors and things like our risk assessments for particular students. We obviously co-operate with other agencies where required. I think we've covered it broadly in that set of actions.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** So there's no specific framework but, you're saying, it's in dribs and drabs everywhere?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** There is a framework at TAFE which ensures that we are keeping our campuses safe and identifying people who should be, for instance, excluded from our campuses or get assistance or counselling, whether it's specifically in the terms you've said.

**CHLOE READ:** Yes, and whether—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Earlier I asked this, Minister, and I didn't think there were any real examples of anyone being excluded.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Or you were going to provide that.

**CHLOE READ:** We're not aware of any. You ask specifically about antisemitism, and we're not aware of specific instances in that case. We do have students, obviously, who may have engaged in other behaviours.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Ms Read, I've got the afternoon with you as well. Minister, does TAFE NSW monitor the use of its IT systems, or network activity, for indicators of violent extremist material being accessed or downloaded on campus networks?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** TAFE NSW has policies relating to use of its networks. I would assume that would specify what type of use was able to be made of its network, but I will ask Ms Read to elaborate on that.

**CHLOE READ:** We obviously have conditions of use for our computer systems and we have various layers of security that you might expect like internet filtering and those kinds of things. Ms Rankin, do you want to—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Filtering? Can you elaborate on that?

**CHLOE READ:** Ms Rankin might want to give us some examples.

**FIONA RANKIN:** Yes, we do have monitoring in place. There are triggers, essentially, and testing, and if there is unacceptable behaviour going across that does not meet with our acceptable use frameworks, then that gets triggered to our cybersecurity team.

**CHLOE READ:** And then the filtering I mentioned—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** So you have particular triggers and then you have, what—

**FIONA RANKIN:** Our cybersecurity team—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** —an IT department that's monitoring this. Is that right?

**FIONA RANKIN:** Yes, that's right. They'll intervene. They'll flag that. They'll investigate that, determine if it's a real issue or if it's just something like someone's hit a wrong button somewhere, which sometimes happens.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, do you have any flags or any triggers brought to your attention in the last 12 months or 24 months?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Have you had any, Ms Read?

**CHLOE READ:** No.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Have there been any?

**FIONA RANKIN:** No.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** There's nothing concerning TAFE about anything being downloaded on any of the campuses.

**FIONA RANKIN:** There might be issues with pornography or those issues. It's looking for those sorts of issues that are outside the acceptable use of TAFE equipment.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Would it be looking at anything that could be construed as hate speech or antisemitic, as well, or radical Islam?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I haven't had any issues drawn to my attention where we've seen that occurring using TAFE resources or on TAFE facilities.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Just using wi-fi and downloading at TAFE is my concern.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** On their own devices?

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Yes, it would trigger if they're downloading on your systems.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'd have to ask Ms Read or Ms Rankin to talk about whether or not, if they're using their own device and using a publicly available wi-fi, that would be triggered. I'm not sure about that.

**CHLOE READ:** Not a publicly available one. If they're using the TAFE system, as I said, there'll be some filtering that would prevent access to certain places on the internet.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Obviously a hotspot, no, but what if they're using the wi-fi that's provided at TAFE?

**CHLOE READ:** There would be filtering that would prevent students from accessing certain areas of the internet, but I'm not sure if there's monitoring specifically on the access.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** If you're monitoring what they're looking at, have you been adding to what is triggering?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** In other words, have there been additional flags that have been added?

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Yes.

**CHLOE READ:** Ms Rankin's going to jump in if I get this wrong. Most of those systems work on a process of essentially blacklisting and whitelisting, in terms of lists of sites that should or shouldn't be—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Can I put it to you, Minister, have they changed—

**CHLOE READ:** Can I just explain—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I think it'd be good to allow Ms Read to finish.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Sure, but she's got the afternoon, Minister.

**CHLOE READ:** They are usually provided to us as a service by companies or agencies that do that work, so they would be continually updated with different terms or places that would be—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Sorry. This is not done in house?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No—well, there may be as well. I'm not sure.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You have a third party that assists you in this regard?

**CHLOE READ:** The lists are usually—do you want to explain, Ms Rankin?

**FIONA RANKIN:** The lists themselves, through Cyber Security NSW or through other agencies within the cybersecurity community say "This is not good material. This is not the site that you want to be in," so we will blacklist those particular sites or there'll be a certain—but that's a dynamic list, depending on what the evolving sites—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Is that a publicly available list of what you flag?

**CHLOE READ:** That might be a question for the Department of Customer Service.

**FIONA RANKIN:** I'd have to confirm that. It's sort of within the cybersecurity—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You can take it on notice. Minister, what policies exist? You've given me a rough idea of what exists, but what formal arrangements does TAFE NSW have in place with New South Wales police or other security agencies to report suspected radicalisation or extremist activity on campus?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Same as the rest of the community. We obviously engage police. The TAFE campus is the same as anywhere on the street. If there's hate speech which is occurring, then it should be dealt with under existing New South Wales law and with the New South Wales police. TAFE engage with the police in any circumstances where they feel that they need to. Ms Read, do you want to add to that?

**CHLOE READ:** No, I think you've covered it well. Obviously there are certain sets of behaviours or challenges. If we stray into the area of students behaving illegally, we would be consulting the police on that.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Thank you for all the statistics that you took on notice in the first session. I'm wondering is there any possibility of having those available by the start of the afternoon session so that we can discuss them in detail?

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**CORRECTED**

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**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Obviously there was a large number of statistics there.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I'm presuming they're all things that you don't have to collate, and that you have available on your systems.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** Happy to see what we're—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It's an interesting thing, particularly on things like completions. There is the NCVER reports which come out every month or so. So there is a very large number of statistics on these areas. It probably might be a matter of—I'm sure that the department later this afternoon could comment on individual NCVER reports, but perhaps we can get it altogether.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I'm sure with something as critically important as completions, I have complete confidence that the officials are all over what is the essential metric in any TAFE.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'm sure they can absolutely get you the totals. Whether they can break them down on every skill by the afternoon, I'm not sure.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Whatever is possible for this afternoon would be greatly appreciated.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, is it still the case that no permanent long-term location has been finalised for Bankstown TAFE?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Bankstown TAFE is a real success story in its current location. Look, I've even brought you a photo of the new hairdressing area and beauty area. They're brand-new TAFE facilities. I opened it with the Premier just recently. We've got new nursing facilities, so we're able to link in with the brand-new hospital which is being built on the old TAFE site. For Bankstown, this is a fantastic facility—a \$2 billion hospital and a brand new TAFE facility. Yes, it is a five-year lease at the moment. We haven't determined what the long-term future is, but we're very excited about the opportunities for people working closely, and to facilitate those links and recognition between the university and TAFE. One of our big challenges at a national level is to try and facilitate easier credit recognition between our institutions, and having a co-location like this is a really great opportunity to do that. So we're very excited about the facilities. When we went around the—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, if I could just redirect, if the issue was around permanency—we've had Bankstown TAFE that's close to 60 years in operation and a publicly owned TAFE campus. We now have no permanency and a long-term rent bill.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We have a fantastic brand-new facility co-located with the university, which is a terrific outcome. When I've spoken to the teachers and the students there, they're really excited about the facility. Part of the work we've done in this is to move a couple of the courses across to Padstow TAFE. We previously, at the Bankstown TAFE, had our animal facilities on an upper floor of a building. They're now on a ground floor, where the animals can get fresh air and outdoors.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I'm familiar with these. I've been to the campus many times.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Our early childhood facilities now have a wonderful playground and a ground floor location. I went through at Padstow and asked the students who were doing their animal courses there whether they preferred the Padstow location or Bankstown, and they all raised their hand for Padstow.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** There was earlier talk about great synergy between Bankstown TAFE and the new hospital. It was going to look at helping develop health vocational training skills. Minister, where will the TAFE facilities feature in the hospital design or future plans?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** There are great opportunities and synergies—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** We talk about co-location. What are the features in the hospital site? We spoke a lot about synergy in the early stages of the hospital planning.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'm sure you're aware that the TAFE site that we're on is very close to the hospital. This TAFE site is up and operating. It won't be on a construction site for the next five years or so. What it has got are nursing training facilities, allied health facilities and even hairdressing and beauty, which are really important ancillary services for a hospital in the area. There's a beautiful library as well. It is really a terrific facility. It does have great opportunities for synergies with the hospital. I'm really pleased that we've been able to expand the health training there so that, when the hospital opens, we will have a flow through of assistants in nursing and of nurses. Being next to the university, that career path is there as well.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** You haven't been able to provide any information here about TAFE facilities featuring in the hospital design or future plans. We talk about co-location. It's completely off the table now. Is that correct?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We haven't made a decision on what happens after the current five-year lease with the university. That's a decision that we don't need to make yet. We'll make that down the track, when we look at how well this arrangement is working—and early indications are that it's a fabulous arrangement—and what the long-term future of some of the rest of the site is. We will have a TAFE in Bankstown that provides certainty for people to come in and, really importantly, has fantastic public transport access. A large cohort of the people at the TAFE are doing things like foundation skills and are immigrants doing English and programs funded by us and the Federal Government. It is an amazing location for those people.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** On the issues concerning permanency and the future of Bankstown TAFE, what alternative sites are currently under consideration? When will a final decision be made?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** As I've said to you, we are not at the point where we need to consider the long-term location of the TAFE at this stage. We have got a five-year lease. We've got a fabulous facility that we've just fitted out—a brand-new facility. Further down the track we'll make a decision on whether it remains there in the university tower or not. We're not at the point of needing to do that yet. The absolute certainty for the people of Bankstown is that the TAFE is there. It's one of 154 TAFE campuses across New South Wales. We are committed to rebuilding TAFE, after the neglect that the previous Government showed, and to boosting it up. We have increased the number of teachers in TAFE. We're making more TAFE teachers permanent following the appalling record of the previous Government, which left us with only 50 per cent of our teachers permanently employed.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What happens to that beautiful, new, expensive fit-out if you leave those premises at the expiration of the lease in five years time? What happens to that cost?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The same thing that happens to any agency which is in leased premises. A large number of agencies and businesses lease premises, fit them out and then, if they need to move, they move and fit out another one. It's too early to be asking that question, because—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Because you haven't decided about permanency yet.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We haven't determined that yet.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** On the fit-out, am I correct in reading the budget papers that there's \$28.3 million allocated to the fit-out on a five-year lease with no permanency?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We have actually utilised \$70 million for the Bankstown TAFE aspect of this and \$30 million at Padstow to rebuild elements of Padstow. Padstow is interesting because the block that we've now got brand-new classrooms and the early childhood services in was derelict under the previous Government. It was unused and derelict. That's now being fully utilised. It's really exciting to see that happening. We have spent \$70 million on the Bankstown aspect of it. Ms Read could go through if there's more detail on a breakdown. When you see the quality of that facility, the excitement of the staff and the enthusiasm of the students, you would have to say it's money well spent.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Does that not motivate you to want to acquire a more permanent arrangement here? These are taxpayer dollars. It's fabulous to have the fit-out, but we've got no permanency. We've got a long-term rent bill. That TAFE was a 60-year-old TAFE campus owned by the Government.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** And the building showed it, because the previous Government simply didn't do the maintenance that was needed to keep our TAFEs up to scratch.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If I could move to Kempsey TAFE, why were a number of courses removed from the Kempsey TAFE campus?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Have you got specific courses that you're referring to?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I don't, no.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll ask TAFE to go into more detail on Kempsey. Our courses are often driven by demand. Under the previous system, the Smart and Skilled system, there were minimum numbers in classes that needed to be met. Courses could be cancelled if we didn't reach that. Obviously, you'll always need a minimum for a course to be viable. What tends to happen is the local TAFE is working to ascertain what the level of demand is. In an overall sense, one of the things that we've been able to do now that we've moved out of the contestable funding market with TAFE is go into communities and talk to them and to businesses about their longer term demand and provide them with more certainty. If we haven't got the demand to offer a course every year, maybe

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**CORRECTED**

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we can say that we offer it every two years. The new system that we've got is going to give us a bit more flexibility, but it'll take us a little while to get that going. We just came out of the contestable market at the beginning of this year. There's a number of TAFEs on the Mid North Coast. We've built some new facilities at Port Macquarie. On Kempsey, I'll ask Ms Read if she has more information.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I actually do have the courses here, but I'm sure Ms Read would have more knowledge than me.

**CHLOE READ:** I don't necessarily have specific campuses with me but I would say, in line with the Minister's comments, that we also review the applicability of different types of courses to industry uptake. As an example, industry might really prefer a diploma over a certificate IV or an advanced diploma but not a diploma. Sometimes we find that over time—IT is a good example of this—there's a point at which you kind of need to jump over a bit of the qualification stack to make sure that industry get what they need from our qualifications. I'm happy to take on notice any specifics if you want to give me the courses.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The courses provided in terms of cancellation related to community services, auto mechanic, building, office administration, IT courses, retail assistant, barista and barbering and hairdressing. In light of the skills shortage and priority on this, it's rather concerning when the community is putting this to us. It's a regional campus. We've had eight courses cancelled.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We'll take that on notice. I do get these things. Often there is a lot more to the story than what you see in some of those initial things. It's really important to actually go through and look at the circumstances, the enrolments and the facilities. For instance, we've had areas where the nursing facilities hadn't been upgraded for a long time and we had to cancel the delivery of courses until we could get them upgraded. That's not one of them. We're happy to look individually at those and provide you with each.

**CHLOE READ:** Yes, we will do.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I would be very pleased if we could examine each of those courses, the timing and the notice given to students of the cancellation.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It was certainly a concern under the old system, where people sometimes found out a day or two before that their course was cancelled.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Exactly—timing, to students, being important.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We do want to try to get away from that.

**CHLOE READ:** I would just say on that, also, sometimes we don't have any enrolments and that's why we discontinue something. If we have a small number of enrolments, we would work with those students to say, "We're not doing this version of the course that you applied for, but this is pretty similar or this is a similar delivery." We'll take that on notice.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I appreciate your work in that space. Further to that, as I mentioned, automotive was on the list. Minister, why is a Certificate I in Automotive Vocational Preparation available but not an automotive mechanic qualification, despite the facilities and infrastructure being available at such a campus?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will ask TAFE to look in more detail about that, but I'm certainly aware that it's often the level of facility that's available and the number of enrolments, and it's also sometimes availability of teachers. We've been working very hard to increase our number of teachers, particularly in heavy vehicle but in general automotive as well. I'll ask TAFE to specifically answer that one as well.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Do you accept that removing these courses may reduce the local skilled workforce pipeline in such an area?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** If someone is taking on an apprentice, we will always work individually with them to find them an opportunity to do their training. We will always make sure that they can do their training somewhere.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** My colleague touched on this a little bit earlier today. How many students travel more than 50 kilometres to access their desired training?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Obviously, in regional New South Wales, more than 50 kilometres is fairly common. I'm not sure that we would have the 50-kilometre one because our VTAS is not on 50 kilometres. We would know the VTAS numbers, I think. Can I ask the department to elaborate on that?

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, I'm conscious of your time. I'm happy to pick that up this afternoon.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** We have information on the number of eligible students for the Vocational Training Assistance Scheme. I can provide that to you this afternoon. That's a scheme that's eligible for students over 110 kilometres.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, in August estimates, TAFE NSW indicated that up to 100 non-teaching roles would be cut. How many positions have now been abolished?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** That is part of our new operating model, which we went through. Can I say, first of all, that there's been a net increase in staff at TAFE NSW because we've taken on more teachers. That's been very important but, as part of the operating model changes, we are close to finalising the final numbers. It is a number that is lower than 100 in net terms. The new operating model has been something which has helped us to actually move to a faculty model for the State. It's going to help us to deliver much better curriculum development. Because we've been able to put many more teachers on as permanent, they've now got 15 hours a week where they can assist with non-teaching activities and do things like curriculum development. We had a big change to the curriculum section. Obviously, in any agency, when you are going through a process of change, there are regrettably going to be some people whose jobs are no longer the way they were. We have gone through a—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Further to that, were any teaching positions affected by this restructure?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, we've actually seen, since June 2022, teacher numbers grow at TAFE by 400. We've now got 87 per cent of our teachers as permanent, and we previously only had around 50 per cent. As I said, that actually means that we, significantly, give them additional paid time to do administration. Because we've now removed TAFE from the contestable funding market, that's a really big decrease in the administrative burden and reporting for our teachers. I'll ask Ms Read to talk about the specific numbers in the restructure.

**CHLOE READ:** As the Minister said, there are two phases to our operating model change, and the second phase we're in our final stages of going through, so I can't give you final numbers. The initial reduction proposed that we talked about in August—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Sorry, Ms Read, the first stage was the cut of 100 non-teaching—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No.

**CHLOE READ:** No, what we talked about in August was phase two, and we told you that the total net reduction proposed was 102. Obviously, what we do when we propose a change like that is we consult with employees. We consult with staff in those areas, and they tell us what they think of the changes and where they think we might want to adjust something because of the pace of delivery or the rate of engagement that we need to have. So that was revised to 89 in the final structure. Within that structure, there are still people who are going through placement process, so what we do is try to place as many people who are impacted as possible in other jobs within TAFE. So we won't know those numbers for a little bit longer. Ms Tickle might know when we'll know.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Can I ask quickly about numbers. Minister, it's good news about an increase in staff numbers. What's the breakdown in terms of increased staff between admin and teaching roles and employment?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** That 400 I mentioned was teaching.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Any increase in admin?

**CHLOE READ:** No, we've reduced.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, we've reduced admin.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** So 400 teachers and fewer admin. How does that correlate to student numbers—up, down?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The student numbers, from my understanding, is just under 400,000 at the moment enrolled in TAFE.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sorry, in terms of increase or decrease, Minister?

**CHLOE READ:** The 2024 numbers are the latest we have, which was 384,000.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Is that an increase or a decrease?

**CHLOE READ:** Compared to 2023, that's a decrease.



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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** So we've got more teachers, fewer admin staff and fewer students. Is that correct?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes, what we're seeing as a trend, which is a positive trend, is a move to more of those longer term qualification courses and away from some of those shorter courses. That's led to a change in some of the enrolment numbers but, of course, it definitely doesn't lead to a change in the workload. The workload continues to be there and continues to be quite high.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** How much of the admin load, given reduced admin staff, is being picked up by the teachers?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Ms Read can elaborate on this, but one of the substantial changes that TAFE has made in this is to move to a faculty model. Within those faculties, they'll do a lot of the curriculum development, using some of that 15 hours time that the teachers have.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** "They" being teachers or "they" being admin staff?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Teachers are working with admin staff as well. Part of the reason for that is, obviously, the teachers are delivering the courses every day, and they generally do want to have an input into the curriculum. A number of the administrative staff savings have come out of the area that used to do the curriculum development. Consistently with the government, we've also been able to reduce our external consultant spending in that area by—I think it was a \$20 million contract, from memory.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What impact does that shift in the way teacher time is being used have on their marking time?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Because we've taken TAFE out of the contestable market, we've significantly reduced the admin load for teachers.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sorry, the question was about marking time.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes, they've still got their marking—let's have a think about two things. Firstly, when we had mostly casual teachers there, they didn't have the 15 hours of administrative time that permanent teachers have. Now, we've raised that to 87 per cent of teachers.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But casuals typically also get paid for marking, Minister.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** They've now got that time. Ms Read can address the specifics of marking time.

**CHLOE READ:** The operational model changes that we're talking about, that phase two, don't relate to the teaching and learning area.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But my question is very simple. I'll ask it next session.

**The CHAIR:** Just before we go to crossbench time, Minister, you were putting up pictures earlier, which make it hard for Hansard to understand what's going on unless you also table them.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I can give you a description of them, if you like.

**The CHAIR:** Would you be open to tabling them? Then we can take a copy.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'm happy to table the pictures.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Your one and only visit to Bankstown, fantastic.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I've been several times, actually.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You haven't invited me.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Actually, I'd be very happy to give you a tour if you want.

**The CHAIR:** If we could table the pictures, that would be great. We don't have very much time now, so I'll just ask a quick one: Given the modern slavery risks and the corruption and all the rest of it, links to organised crime, that comes with the security services industry, will you look to insource security services into TAFE?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I don't have the budget to be able to do that at the moment. We would have to be working as part of the whole-of-government approach on this. Obviously, it's something that the Cabinet and the Treasurer and the Premier would have to be involved in.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, back on the issue I raised before, can I ask formally if TAFE NSW has requested advice from Commonwealth security agencies about heightened risks of radicalisation among young people in education settings.

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**CORRECTED**

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**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'd have to ask Ms Read. I'm not aware of a request to the Commonwealth on that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** No, whether you've requested it.

**CHLOE READ:** I know we're at the end of the estimates sessions, but that'll be a question for the Premier's Department. They would seek that advice, I would have thought, for the whole government. Mr Dizdar might have more.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We have seconded New South Wales police in the Department of Education, so we work very closely with State and Commonwealth authorities around any risk factors that may impact on any educational setting.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** I have one question. Minister, can you please update the Committee on the Labor Government's commitment to rebuild TAFE?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Thank you, I'd be delighted to. A couple of these aspects I've covered in some of the answers before, but we do think it's a really important move that the New South Wales Labor Government has taken TAFE out of the contestable market and out of the Smart and Skilled system. We don't think that it was fair that TAFE was treated as another provider in the contestable market. TAFE should be at the core of provision of vocational education and training in New South Wales. Indeed, I'm really pleased that the Albanese Government recognises that at the Federal level as well and in their policies.

We believe that TAFE has the opportunity to grow as the centre of vocational education and training in New South Wales both in the city and also in country areas, where for too long its really important role as a community hub started to diminish and become less visible. Taking TAFE out of the contestable market is a really important part of that. It means restoring trust with teachers, ensuring that New South Wales students can get access to the training that they need, and recognising a really simple principle—that TAFE is a public institution with a public mission, and it shouldn't be forced to compete in a private market that pulls teachers away from teaching.

That compliance that I've talked about before is very real. One of the first things that the Teachers Federation and teachers at TAFEs were talking to me about when I took on this portfolio was the amount of time they had to spend in just reporting on the Smart and Skilled requirements. We've taken that away so that they can focus on curriculum development and teaching. That's a really commonsense way to go about it. The Government has also, as part of that, been able to reduce the consultancy spending at TAFE on curriculum development to firstly make sure that we have those skills in house, but secondly as part of the overall Government policy on reducing spending on consultancy.

We've seen, under the previous Government, the casualisation of our teaching workforce. We saw permanency rates fall to just half the teaching workforce, and that meant that we were losing teachers and seeing them not have the sort of job security that they needed to be able to make a long-term career in TAFE teaching. I'm really pleased that we've now got 87 per cent of teachers permanent—about 3½ thousand people have been made permanent as a part of that. We've seen a 7 per cent growth in teachers across TAFE. Again, that's because we've improved conditions of employment, we've scrapped the wages cap and delivered pay rises for TAFE teachers as well as taking them out of the contestable system. We're respecting our teachers, we're paying them properly and valuing them. It doesn't stop there. We're also investing in rebuilding TAFE assets in simple things like making sure the wi-fi works.

The situation that we had in many of our campuses was that the wi-fi in those campuses was put in when Labor was last in government, and it hadn't been upgraded. I went to the Wagga TAFE campus, where they didn't have the capacity to even hook into the manufacturer's maintenance systems for the tractors that they were dealing with, and that caused grief for them there. Upgrading those sorts of systems is really important. Replacing roofs—leaky roofs at Blacktown, Forbes, Griffith, Port Macquarie and St Leonards are all being replaced and the air-conditioning system upgraded in many of our areas. I'm really pleased about the commitment that the Government's making to TAFE and very excited by the confidence that's building in our system for the people of New South Wales and for our teachers and staff in TAFE.

**The CHAIR:** We're delighted for you.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'm sure you are.

**The CHAIR:** That takes us to morning tea break. We will be back at 11.15 a.m.

**(Short adjournment)**

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**CORRECTED**

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**The CHAIR:** Minister, I need to ask you a few questions in relation to electrical training and courses currently being offered in TAFE. These are updates to questions that I asked you last time. Firstly, in relation to electrical apprentices, the last time I asked you I was getting information that there were a number who were on the job who hadn't done any training. Can you tell me what the current number is of apprentices who are on the job who haven't done any training?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I want to be clear that people obviously have to do some preparation to go on a worksite. We essentially ensure that everybody who is doing an apprenticeship does get access to training. It may not be the day they start. Some of the media reporting we saw on electrical apprenticeships saying that there weren't courses available was not correct. At that stage, there were 25 campuses offering the electrotechnology course. We're working to expand the availability of electrotechnology in a number of locations, particularly in the areas where there are REZ developments going on. We are working to upgrade our facilities and recruit more teachers where we can. We are working with industry as well around—obviously, the key thing about being on a worksite is safety. So it's really important that people are only on worksites if they are supervised and have done some of that training. Can I ask the department to elaborate on apprentices getting access to that training?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** I don't have any further information other than what we provided in that question on notice. I'm happy to take on notice any updated information that we have specifically.

**The CHAIR:** That would be fantastic. I understand from the answers to the questions I asked last time that there is no current Certificate IV in Electrical - Renewable Energy being offered at TAFE NSW, but it is offered through some registered training organisations. In the answer that I was given, it refers to TAFE regularly reviewing and assessing the demand. Has there been sufficient interest in that course to now offer a certificate IV?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll get TAFE to answer the specifics, but we have been working with our manufacturing centres of excellence, particularly the one in the Hunter. There's a range of new courses that are going to be coming online there. Some are already available, but a number of additional ones are being developed at the moment which will specifically deal with the renewable energy industry. They are aimed at existing and new people working in the electrical field. In terms of a certificate IV, I'll ask Ms Read to deal with that one.

**CHLOE READ:** I'm not aware that we've added it, but I will check and let you know if that's different. In terms of the manufacturing centres of excellence, we undertook a successful pilot with ASQA of a self-accredited course—so not a nationally recognised one but one we've developed with industry—in sustainable and circular manufacturing, which will be offered, I think, from semester two this year.

**The CHAIR:** That's great. How many qualified electrical trades teachers does TAFE currently employ?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll ask Ms Read. We may have to take that on notice. I'm very aware that we are looking for one in Dubbo.

**CHLOE READ:** Ms Tickle is going to help me with something. I think we've got around 300. We also have, I think, five or six coming through the current round of Paid to Learn, so cohort eight of Paid to Learn. Overall, in Paid to Learn we've had 87 come through that program.

**The CHAIR:** The budget provided \$40.2 million over two years for fee-free apprenticeships and traineeships to fund an additional, I think, 23,000 construction apprenticeships. What is the current take-up rate?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll get the department to answer with the specific figures. Just by way of background, one of the things that we're seeing is in those trade apprenticeships like electrical and building, the demand is not rising the way we'd like to see it rise to meet the challenge that we've got for the economy overall. We'd certainly be wanting to encourage more young people and more parents to think about careers in those trade spaces. When we were talking earlier about completions and things, those courses actually have higher levels of completions than some of those non-trade apprenticeships and courses—things like project management stuff as opposed to electrical stuff. They have better completions. So there's still a real challenge, and that's one of the reasons why we expanded the EPP program to those additional schools, to try and build that demand. We'll fund everyone that comes through the door for an apprenticeship for the training, but we just need to build the demand. On the specifics of the numbers, can the department provide any more information on that?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** In construction, housing and infrastructure—that's how we define it—we've had around 40,000 people commence a qualification in New South Wales in 2024. That's the latest full-year data that we have available to us that's nationally comparable at the moment. In relation to fee-free, the Minister also spoke about fee-free apprenticeships and traineeships. We also signed an agreement with the Commonwealth Government last year for additional funding for pre-apprenticeships and traineeships as well, which, as the Minister says, allows individuals to essentially undertake a short taster course—for want of a better term—to also

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build their capacity and interest in the construction industry as well. There's around 2,000 of those places available over a couple of years as well.

**The CHAIR:** So 2,000 places available, and that's different to the \$40.2 million for the fee-free apprenticeship that was in the budget.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** Yes.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** There are a number of different buckets to these, and they fund different aspects of the fee-free.

**The CHAIR:** How many people have taken it up?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** That's the New South Wales Government's apprenticeship pathway, I'm assuming.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** Yes. We have around 90,000 apprenticeships and trainees in New South Wales at the moment currently studying. They would've studied fee free in New South Wales. We also have fee-free arrangements funded by the Commonwealth Government as well which don't relate to apprenticeships and traineeships. They're general full qualifications that the Commonwealth Government funds. Then we have the pre-apprenticeship and traineeship cohort that I spoke about a moment ago.

**The CHAIR:** How much of that \$40.2 million has been spent?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** I'll have to take that on notice. Ms Lawrence, do you have those figures?

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** No. We can provide those on notice.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** I'll take those on notice.

**The CHAIR:** What's the completion rate at the moment for construction apprenticeships?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll get you the specifics on that, but there were 23,000 commencements in construction. I think the figures I've got here, though, are the Commonwealth ones. As I mentioned before, there's construction and electrical, and some of those have a higher completion rate than—the example that's been given to me of the lowest completion rate is travel at the moment. Some of the ones where there has been interaction with an employer and employment afterwards are certainly leading to better outcomes. On some questions we had before about completion rates, in the break I got a very helpful graph, which I'm happy to table. What it shows us is that in our Smart and Skilled space in New South Wales, which TAFE was in until this year, we saw a fairly substantial drop-off in the years leading up to 2023. We've seen a bit of a spike in completion rates. There are some lagging figures here. One of the interesting things about this is that this red one here is universities. So our completion rates actually compare quite well against universities as we're going through vocational training. I'm happy to table that. It's got the sources on the back.

**The CHAIR:** That would be great. If you could give me any other information on construction—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'm happy to take on notice some of the more industry-specific ones.

**The CHAIR:** We might come back this afternoon as well. What about the \$13.8 million Construction Workforce Package, which was designed to upskill and support I think 4,800 workers into residential construction jobs over the next two years? How's that going?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I believe that's the one we signed on with the Federal Government through the national training agreement. Would that be right?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** Yes, and also the New South Wales Government's own budget announcement last year with the additional work. You are referring to the housing construction work.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We are doing a number of things to try and assist with getting people into construction trades and also with people who want to do mid-career transitions and upskill to get into the trades. There's a number of initiatives as part of that. I can ask the department to outline the initiatives that are involved in that.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** Part of the housing Construction Workforce Package essentially has three different streams. The first of it is upskilling existing workers in the construction industry to upskill their existing qualifications. That's for around 4,000 existing workers to essentially move into a formal trade pathway. The second component is in relation to helping existing workers and migrants to gain a formal qualification but at the same grade they are at the moment. The third is around also building awareness in schools through additional programs like the Tiny Homes program that we've spoken about at previous estimates sessions which is all about engaging more schoolchildren and school-aged children in the housing and construction industry.

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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, you said earlier, "Our TAFE campuses haven't had much activity in this area," when I questioned about the signs of violent extremism and radicalisation. Ms Read then referred to a number of existing policies when I asked about what had been done in that area. I just want to confirm the policies because Ms Read did say that TAFE had updated or strengthened its response to violent extremism and radicalisation. Can I just confirm, were you, Ms Read, through your Minister, referring to the Student Conduct and Discipline Policy, the Student Critical Incident Policy and the Student Diversity, Wellbeing and Inclusion Policy when I asked about that?

**CHLOE READ:** They're the policies that would be applicable. Remember we were talking about the notion of a framework—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I asked you specifically about TAFE's response to violent extremism and radicalisation. You said that you strengthened your response to it.

**CHLOE READ:** Yes, but not through revision of the policies. What we did was add information to the student induction and orientation. We communicated directly with students. We have campus signage.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I think you have answered it. My question is specifically whether you have reviewed it, because the dates I have are either all from July or May of '25, so clearly prior to the attack at Bondi. Minister, given the seriousness of the Bondi attack, will you direct TAFE NSW to review and update its policies to specifically address violent extremism and radicalisation on campus?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I think TAFE has outlined well the additional work that it has done in response to Bondi to ensure—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** But it's not in any policies, so I am not sure how it's doing that.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Do you want to pick out an element of the policy that you think is inadequate? Because I contend to you that—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** My point being, if you haven't reviewed it since July or May last year, I am asking what you've done since the attack in Bondi.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I suggest to you that TAFE in conjunction and working closely with the Premier's Department and the Department of Education has ensured that its policies are fit for purpose. I would expect them to do that. I would expect that if there was a deficiency in the policy it would be updated. The work that TAFE has done, to the best of my knowledge, hasn't identified a deficiency.

**CHLOE READ:** If we go, for example, to the *Student Conduct and Discipline Procedure Manual*—which the policy refers to—a major behavioural breach of conduct under that policy for a student would be any form of harassment or vilification whether based on gender, race, age, sexual preference or religious belief, including through the use electronic devices or social media; any abusive, aggressive, threatening, intimidating or violent behaviour including through the use of electronic devices and social media; and acting in a way or encouraging others to act in a way which endangers the health, safety or wellbeing of others.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** On that, Ms Read, I think you are actually coming to something that I do want to ask. Minister, when I asked earlier about the use of TAFE NSW's IT systems and wi-fi you did say, "I would assume that it would specify what type of use of its network." Just to be clear, Minister, when students connect their personal laptops or phones to the TAFE wi-fi network on campus, how does TAFE monitor the downloading or accessing of extremist material, or is there no monitoring at all?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I think Ms Rankin dealt with that before around the flags that are raised. For people who are logged on with their own unique user ID, I assume that covers that. Perhaps Ms Read or Ms Rankin might like to elaborate on that.

**CHLOE READ:** I might go to the policy, and you might go to the tech. Again, the policy for acceptable use of information and technology is very clear that people cannot access material that is profane, obscene, promotes illegal acts, or condones violence or discrimination.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** How do you monitor that? That's the issue that I'm trying to get to.

**CHLOE READ:** In terms of the monitoring, Ms Rankin, did you want to recap?

**FIONA RANKIN:** We have preventive controls in place with regard to the web filter technologies, and we also have categorisation frameworks which identify certain sites. We identify and block particular sites.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** How often do you update those sites?

**FIONA RANKIN:** It is very dynamic. To answer your earlier question—

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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** How often do you update that? Is that something that is reviewed regularly? Which sites?

**FIONA RANKIN:** Yes. Very regularly.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** What's regular?

**FIONA RANKIN:** Those sites are identified by my cybersecurity team. To answer your earlier question in the earlier session, they're not publicly available. They're determined by my cybersecurity team and it's based on particular activity—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** They are regularly reviewed weekly? Monthly?

**FIONA RANKIN:** I'd say pretty much weekly. Almost daily.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Can you just confirm that on notice for me, please?

**FIONA RANKIN:** Yes, sure.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You said "pretty much", so I just want to clarify that.

**CHLOE READ:** They would be connected to other agencies. Law enforcement and—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** TAFE isn't out there on its own trying to do this sort of thing. TAFE is a part of the New South Wales Government as a whole.

**FIONA RANKIN:** In addition to that, if there are individuals that are a concern, there is an authorisation process by which we could monitor those individuals. But, because of privacy concerns and all the legal implications, that type of monitoring needs to be authorised by the managing director or myself.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, does TAFE NSW keep records of external visitors, speakers or organisations attending or conducting activities on TAFE campuses?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Certainly, for activities which are utilising the TAFE facilities by external bodies, we would have to have agreements with those groups—for instance, if someone was hiring, and there is specific purposes for which people are able to hire. My understanding is that our policy is that you can hire TAFE facilities which we are not using at the time for educational and related purposes, but there is a range of purposes for which you can't hire facilities at TAFE. That includes some religious uses, as I understand it as well.

**CHLOE READ:** That's right.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** There's a specific policy?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It's a specific policy about the hire of the facilities. That is to that part of the question you talked about there. In terms of people who come on the campus, say, to speak to classes, you would expect—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** What about, Minister, people that come that are invited, for example, to deliver sermons, or clerics that are invited to participate in any prayer halls or meetings or gatherings onsite?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll ask the managing director to deal with that. I've not heard of anybody being invited to conduct a sermon on a TAFE campus.

**CHLOE READ:** No.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** They might, for example, be invited by students to attend a prayer meeting.

**CHLOE READ:** I'll take on notice if we have any knowledge of that. I wouldn't be aware of any of that kind of activity on our sites, but I'll take that on notice and make sure of it.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The thing about it, as well, is that people come to do their vocational training at TAFE. It's not like a university where they are there every day of the week and it's their social hub as well. It's just a different sort of environment to a university campus.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I understand that. I just want to refer to an individual by the name of Mr Wissam Haddad, who was found by the Federal Court to have disseminated racist and antisemitic material in July last year. He is associated with the Al Madina Dawah Centre in Bankstown, which is about 500 metres or so from the TAFE. He regularly attended different prayer hall meetings and seminars and was invited as a guest. Do you have any records of whether he's ever attended the Bankstown TAFE there?

**CHLOE READ:** Not that I am aware of. I can take that on notice.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You can take that on notice. Do you know if any member or representative of the Al Madina Dawah Centre—which has since been shut down in December of last year—has ever been invited to speak or has participated in any event at Bankstown TAFE?

**CHLOE READ:** I am not aware of that but I'll take it on notice.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Can I also just ask whether there are any records of any material from this organisation being disseminated onsite or outside the TAFE site? They regularly handed out material in different parts of Bankstown. Are there any records of any material to that effect?

**CHLOE READ:** I'm not aware of any on the site. Obviously, I don't have control or necessarily visibility of what happens outside of TAFE sites.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** If an organisation like that turned up and handed out outside Bankstown TAFE—at the gate, for example—would you keep records?

**CHLOE READ:** I think we would if there was an incident logged for some reason, but obviously I wouldn't have an ability to intervene in that or to control that. It's not TAFE land.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It's not TAFE land.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** But you would ask them to move on?

**CHLOE READ:** I wouldn't have the right to ask them to move on from public land.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I think if anybody wanted to complain about it, they'd have to talk to the police about that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I just wanted to know whether there have been any instances—

**CHLOE READ:** I'm not aware of any, but I will—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** —of any representative from that organisation, which has since been shut down, having handed out material either on the TAFE site or at the gate of the TAFE site.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** To be clear, you're not saying they have?

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** No, I'm not suggesting that.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** You're just asking if they have.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I'm asking whether they have.

**CHLOE READ:** Let me see what we can find out.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Minister, thank you for this graph. It's very helpful. Just a question so I can understand it: It's New South Wales Government-funded places?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes. You might see the Smart and Skilled. That was how all of our Government-funded vocational training places were provided until TAFE has come out of the contestable market this year.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** When did TAFE come out of this—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The beginning of this semester. Those figures don't reflect that.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** They include TAFE or they don't include TAFE?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** They do include TAFE.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** For that period. Thank you very much. That's very helpful. The review of the Apprenticeship and Traineeship Act that you were discussing before, when will that report be publicly released?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** That's something for the Cabinet to consider.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Why is it secret?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It is a normal process. Normal process with any report of this type is that Cabinet has to consider its release.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** It was handed down well over six months ago. What's so controversial?

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

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** It was published on 7 August 2025. It's now the middle of March 2026.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Sorry, are you talking about the Apprenticeship and Traineeship Act review?

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Yes.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** That's only just been completed.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What date was that?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We've only just completed the work on that. We've been out on consultation on the—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What date was it?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I can't give you an exact date. We were conducting the review during last year. We were consulting with, as I said, nearly 9,000 people who responded. We had forums with our apprentices in various areas and with business—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** The work is tremendous.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The work is great.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What we're interested in is when that's going to be publicly available.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** That's a Cabinet decision.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Do we have any timeline on that?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I can't foreshadow that decision at the moment.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But you'd be responsible for bringing it up to Cabinet and pushing it through, wouldn't you, Minister?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes, I will be.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** So what's your timeline on hoping to get that in the public domain?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'm not going to discuss what I might be bringing to Cabinet.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Just to follow on from questions from my colleague Ms Boyd, in terms of the housing and construction workforce pipeline, is the Government confident that we've got the skills training in place to be able to meet the construction targets for homes in New South Wales?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I think it's probably fair to say that what I've seen, if you've looked at the HIA and Master Builders reports, is that there is a projection of a substantial shortage of workers in the construction industry. That's why we are working hard to try and encourage more people to come into the construction sector through apprenticeships, pathways, schools and mid-career transitions, and also addressing an area which has really not worked well in the past, which is skilled migration. People coming in that sector have often found that they are working well below their level of expertise and that's often because we haven't been able to match their skills to the relevant qualification and safety criteria in Australia. We're putting some resources in to try to do that better as well.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Can we just pick up on that skilled migration point? Because I think that's really interesting and really important. You've talked a lot about how you are in conversations with the Federal Government about a range of things. When, for example, was the last time that you met with Federal immigration Minister to make sure that TAFE skills priorities align with what's currently on the skilled migration list?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I am Minister for skilled migration in New South Wales as well. I go to the immigration Ministers' meetings.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** The last one of those was when?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** November last year. Prior to that, when I first came on, I did advocate putting construction on the skilled list, because it wasn't before, and that happened after that.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** If TAFE was targeting the areas of skills that we identify as having to import into the country, would we need to bring in as many skilled migrants if we were training our own people? Is TAFE doing this work to make sure we're training our own people?



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**CORRECTED**

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**Mr STEVE WHAN:** As I said in my previous answer to you, addressing the skills shortage is a combination of things. Of course our first priority is to get Australians doing these jobs. Where there are Australians available to do these jobs—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But, Minister, with respect, you just said that you got construction put on the skilled immigration list rather than driving training of construction workers ourselves.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No. You can misrepresent what I said all you like. It's very clear—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Well then, concretely, what are you doing to improve construction outcomes?

**The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG:** Point of order—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Let's not go down the path of—

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

**The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG:** The Minister is trying to articulate an answer, and he is given no time whatsoever. There are constant interjections for want of making a political point. I ask that you call the member to order and allow the Minister to express an articulate answer, which he's more than capable doing.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** To the point of order: I recognise the Minister can reply in any way he likes, but it would be very nice to get a reply to the question I asked rather than matters adjacent to that question.

**The CHAIR:** I generally uphold the point of order. Could we have a bit more space between question and answer so that Hansard can accurately record.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It is really important to note that I did not just say that we were only looking at immigration for these pathways. I think it is really disappointing to see the right wing of Australian politics trying to suggest those things at the moment. What we are doing in Australia overall and what we are doing in New South Wales is working very hard to develop our local workforce for the construction sector, through our training in our skills system—and it's not just TAFE. We have a skills list in New South Wales and six priority skills areas, which include housing, construction, the REZs and the renewable zones, and a number of other areas where we know we're short.

We know that Australia, with its current growth population demographics, is not going to be producing enough workers over the forward decades to actually meet those needs. But we are working to encourage all people. We're doing a number of things. There's the Educational Pathways Program that I mentioned to engage young people with potential vocational careers. We're providing additional assistance for people who might be disengaged from school to come back in and actually try vocational careers through things like the Get Back in the Game program. The RIEP program is doing similar things in regional areas. We work with Indigenous Australians in regional New South Wales to engage them and provide them with careers which they can do in their local areas and get training. That is the primary focus of what we do.

To help that along, we look at skilled migration. When we look at the numbers of skilled migrants coming to Australia at the moment—this year around 185,000 nationally—New South Wales's share of the positions which we can allocate has actually shrunk this year, and we'd like to see some more in those areas. It's important to recognise that this is not about people taking away jobs from Australians. We have shortages which run into the tens of thousands in the construction sector, and we will do everything that we can to get every Australian young person who is suited to working in that area into those jobs. We won't get the job done unless we actually tackle it from all angles.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Minister, with respect to all those general programs that you named, what analysis has been done that shows the impact on construction completions over the last two years?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Do you mean in terms of the workforce impact on construction completions?

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What I mean is you've mentioned several times a number of good general programs to encourage enrolment in TAFE. I'm wondering what analysis there is of the impact of those programs on increasing completions in the construction and housing pipeline of workers.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** When we look at programs—let's go from a few different angles on this. Of course, you know the work that the New South Wales Government is doing to make a quicker pathway for approvals, to make sure that we have more areas where we can build housing.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Minister, I'm not asking about housing policy, with respect. I'm asking what analysis of the general policies you've outlined has been done to show what, if any, impact there is on more students completing courses that allow them to build houses for Australians?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I think you saw, on that graph before, the drop-off that we had before we came to government.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** This graph doesn't talk about housing, specifically. My questions are housing specific, Minister.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** You might have heard me outline before, programs like the EPP, which has produced a big boost.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** The general programs—hence my question.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** If someone started on an apprenticeship in the first year we came to government, they haven't finished yet. If they start—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** And the retention rate so far?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The retention rates, as I mentioned to you before, in construction and electrical are higher than the average ones, and our retention rates in New South Wales have gone up since this Government came in.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** In housing construction trades generally?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Overall apprenticeship rates.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What about the construction trades?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We can see whether or not we can break down some of those figures more on retention. But retention, as I said to you before, is better—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Is a good guide, yes.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** —in areas where you do have an employment outcome at the end of it, and housing construction is one of those areas where you get that. I'm not going to say retention is perfect. I acknowledged that before. We've got a lot of work to do.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** We accept good rather than perfect.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** But what we're seeing documented at the moment is the success of programs like EPP and RIEP in getting the people in. It's too early to tell—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sorry, Minister, how is that being documented in respect to construction?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** EPP goes into trades overall. I'll ask the department to talk about the—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But where's the documentation that shows that success? I don't think we've seen that yet.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I think the department actually quoted you figures before, so I'll ask the secretary to requote you those figures.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** In relation to construction? Can we break it down according to trade areas?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'll have to take it on notice in relation to trade, but where we're seeing success that's been—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** The question relates to trade.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** It's not general enrolment in short courses.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Both the Minister and Mr Dizdar have been trying to answer a legitimate question and, again, Ms Carter has not been allowing them to get to an answer.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** They are not answering my question, with respect. They are answering general questions.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** With respect, you don't get to tell them how to answer.

**The CHAIR:** Let's just avoid more points of order by being a little bit more—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Perhaps I can move on to something else. That might assist the Chair. Minister, how many TAFE courses in the construction-related industries were cancelled due to insufficient enrolments in 2025 and in 2024?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** In TAFE specifically or in the skills sector overall, vocational?

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** In TAFE specifically.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** TAFE will have to answer the question specifically about numbers of cancelled courses. But, as mentioned to you before, the key thing that we do in this is that every apprentice coming into this will be trained. So if the particular TAFE that they're near—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** It's a question about cancelled courses.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It's very easy to try to narrow it down to make particular point, but the really important point for all the parents who might be watching this who want to send their kids into a trade course—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** There's no-one.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Let's be ambitious about this, you never know—is for them to know that if their child wants to do an apprenticeship, we will train them, TAFE will find a place for them to do their training and make sure that they have the pathways available. I'll pass over to Ms Read.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Minister, that's a lovely aspiration, but we have received reports that—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, it's not an aspiration; it's something we do.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I can tell you that in 2025 there were students wanting to do cabinet making and their courses were cancelled. They were just told to reapply later on.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Whereabouts?

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I don't have that location. I can possibly find it for you.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Cabinet making, I'd say, is available in many of our TAFE campuses across New South Wales.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** In every campus?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, of course not. There are 154 campuses and, as you'd probably know if you visited some of them, they have different levels of equipment. For instance, if you are doing waterproofing and tiling, you don't have the facilities for that in every campus. There are two campuses that can do that. If you're doing nursing, obviously you've got to have a standard of facilities which meet that, and that's not in every campus. You've got to actually look at where those facilities are logically deliverable and available. Of course, IAT – Construction has a lot of them, but they're across a lot of—so, no, no course is available, except maybe English foundation skills.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Can I ask you a question about facilities?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Do you want Ms Read to address the question that you asked before?

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Yes, thank you, but then I want to come back to facilities.

**CHLOE READ:** On the cancelling specifically of trade courses for 2024—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Related to construction trades.

**CHLOE READ:** I will take it on notice, but I will just clarify that there are points where if there are insufficient numbers across two very close campuses we might combine classes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What's the definition of close?

**CHLOE READ:** I'll give you that information on notice if we have it. But I just want to flag, as the Minister said, sometimes we might put out an offering and no-one expresses interest, so that would be discontinued. We'll need to see if we can filter those out. Sometimes, with small numbers, we might combine offerings, we might offer people something different but very related, and so the data will be complex, would be my answer on that. But we will take on notice what we can find and come back to you for trades.

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**CORRECTED**

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**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Of course, under the old Smart and Skilled system—the system that your Government introduced—there was a hard figure where we had to cancel a class. We're hoping to move away from that and give a bit more certainty to people.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Great. Facilities, I'm interested in—I don't know how to frame it. Perhaps we're talking about soft facilities, like hairdressing, for example. What does TAFE do to make sure that there are enough heads to be cut for practice? For example, Minister, have you had your hair cut by a TAFE student?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I had my hair cut recently by a 16-year-old hairdresser in a TAFE campus, but he wasn't actually a TAFE student. He was in as part of one of our displays, one of our open day type things. He did a very good job. He was from Wollongong. When you talk about soft facilities, as in hairdressing, bizarrely, one of the most expensive things we put into these places is the hairdressing basins. It's incredible. As for the heads, and Ms Read can elaborate on this, TAFE uses, obviously, in the early stages a lot of the artificial—the hair things. But then they generally engage with their communities and get people in for cheap haircuts. When I go in there, I often see a lot of pensioners and others who are in there getting a haircut as part of TAFE. It's a little bit like those TAFE restaurants where people can come in and use them. They're very popular, where they exist. Perhaps Ms Read can—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** My information, Minister, is that hairdressing in particular, especially when students are getting towards the point where they have to complete a certain number of different types of styles, different types of dyes, different types of cuts, there are regularly not enough people there and students basically are told to outsource. That means not cutting or colouring or styling under supervision but taping themselves and then, for assessment, often submitting a video on their phone of them doing that particular cut. The questions really go to do we have the right support for these students? Are they actually learning to do these skills under supervision? And is the assessment robust or are there problems because we have greater demand for these skills than we have—the word I'm using is—soft facilities to accommodate them?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Volunteers, I think—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Volunteers. But that must apply to other things other than hairdressing too.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll let Ms Read deal with whether or not doing something outside and videoing comes back in. But I do know that when I go to TAFE and when I talk to people that there is a high level of supervision. We do have classes that are conducted online. As you're probably aware, the previous Government built a number of TAFE facilities which were just online facilities. When we deliver there, it's not one of those delivery of courses where you work through it yourself—you've actually got a live teacher who's watching and observing. But, obviously, in hairdressing you've got to have the facility to go with it, so it's a bit different.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** This is exactly—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We've got some mobile beauty facilities that go around to help people with their access. But TAFE has actually just recently been given the tick by the Federal regulatory authority for its quality and its teaching. It's been reaccredited for the longest period possible, because it met all the standards. I'll ask Ms Read to address how they—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** If it's helpful, as well, a number of our schools, Ms Carter, are running programs at school, alongside our partners.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** The question, really, is are we matching the need to supervise students and to train them appropriately, and also assess them appropriately, with, for example, heads of hair? There would be examples in other trades as well. My information is students are being told, "If you want to graduate on time, you're going to have to go out, do it yourself, send us a tape so we know that you've done it." They physically are not being able to do it supervised at TAFE. I think there are questions there that should be explored.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Ms Read can answer that specifically. But I have to say that I have not seen a single representation come across my desk that complains about that. But I'll ask—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I can tell you, from my survey of women getting their hair cut at salons, there are many representations of that.

**CHLOE READ:** If you want to provide us with any information outside the session, we're very happy to receive it. We have a statewide faculty model now. One of the things that we're looking at in that model is how we consider the sourcing and provision of—in my head it's called consumables, so I'm not talking about the people with the heads of hair, but the dyes and those kinds of things. I'm looking to make sure that we have good processes and contracts in place that let us make sure we have the right equipment in the places.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Perhaps we can come back and explore this this afternoon in detail.

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**CORRECTED**

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**CHLOE READ:** I'll just say in terms of the specific access to heads of hair and people, as the Minister said, we do have people come in to our TAFEs to get a cheap haircut—cheap in terms of price but not in terms of quality.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I'm keen to ask the Minister other questions at the moment.

**CHLOE READ:** Also they do a lot of training in the workplace.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** And of course the workplace is really important.

**CHLOE READ:** I just want to make sure that's understood.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I understand, that's part of the model. Minister, given the Commonwealth is establishing the Australian Tertiary Education Commission, what steps have you taken to engage with the Federal Minister in relation to that and New South Wales's presence in that?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We have been consulted as we've gone through this. We've had feedback about the legislation. The Commonwealth has taken into account a number of our comments on the legislation. They particularly related to making sure that we had a robust framework for consultation with the States on decisions that were going through. This is a really important body. We've obviously seen a number of issues around university governance raised. There's an important place for the Commonwealth to take a leadership role in this—they have all the funding power, they have the power essentially through the Corporations Act, but the States want to be engaged in that. So we've been closely involved in the formation of the commission and who's on it. The education department is involved in the process as well, so they can elaborate on where that's at at the moment.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** Last year when the ATEC was established there was also a process related to the establishment of mission compacts with each individual university. I understand that process has recently kicked off with what the Commonwealth defines as table A and table B higher education providers, which includes all universities in New South Wales. As part of that process yesterday, at officials level, we were asked for State and Territory input in relation to State priorities for each university. We will be engaging with the Minister and government as part of that process.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I'm conscious my time has expired but we can perhaps explore this later.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, I just want to clarify the line of questioning that I had earlier. I just want to ask, and you can take this on notice, has Mr Wissam Haddad or any other associate or representative of the Al Madina Dawah group ever visited Bankstown, Granville or any other TAFE for any purpose?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** To the extent we can answer that, we will take that on notice.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, can I also ask can you please conduct a review of the new TAFE NSW visitor logs and provide on notice to this Committee if and how many times Mr Wissam Haddad or any other associate or representative of the Al Madina Dawah group has visited a TAFE campus in New South Wales? And if they have, which campus and on how many occasions in the past five years?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** What I'll take on notice is whether we can provide that information and to what extent we can.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Yes, I'm satisfied with that. Can I just move on quickly to an important part of your portfolio, tertiary education. Minister, I've asked you this previously and you've given me some answers but I want to ask you again. You do have some functions as a tertiary education Minister and you have the power to request specific reports under section 32D of the Western Sydney University Act. You have the power to seek a report on commercial operations of Western Sydney University. Have you done that to date?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Not on the commercial operations of Western Sydney University. What I have been talking to university vice-chancellors about is getting more information in their annual reports to Parliament, particularly around the use of consultants. So we are working to incorporate more consistent reporting in that area and those reports will be presented to the Parliament.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** What about specifically with Western Sydney University? Have you spoken to them at all about their commercial operations or the use of consultants at their university?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, as I said, we are certainly interested to see more consistent information provided about use of consultants, pretty much in the same way as government is providing that sort of information at the moment. We will be working with the Commonwealth, and you might have seen there's been an expert panel on university governance. We'll also be interested to see the outcomes from the Legislative Council inquiry in this area and ensuring that we're able to address those areas that are raised by the Commonwealth. You may be aware the Commonwealth has had a number of contacts with universities about what its expectations are around

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**CORRECTED**

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governance, and I am in close contact with the Federal Minister on those. As part of the Education Ministers Meeting, I get to have input into that process as well.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, can I just turn your attention to the Milperra Western Sydney University campus. Have any details from the sale of the land at the former Western Sydney University Milperra campus been made available to you?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** My understanding is that all happened before we came to government and it's not something that I've asked for information on. It was something which the department could perhaps—I don't even know, because we weren't in government, whether or not we had to approve that sale.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I can help there, Minister. The approval was given in 2018.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Yes, but when did the final sale take place? I think you'll find it was after. It was when Mr Whan was in government.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, I've got details of when the approval was for the sale but let me come back to you on when the actual sale happened.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The thing is that once government gives its approval, we don't then oversight the sale, obviously.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I'd like to know if you're aware of what the net proceeds of the total value was for that sale.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, I'm not, but I believe you might have the vice-chancellor here this afternoon and he may wish to answer that question.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Government approval was in 2018.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** In budget estimates of 29 August last year, it was revealed that it was \$24.8 million from the sale of the Milperra land, just so that you can have that information, Minister. It was your budget estimates. Do you know how the proceeds from the Milperra land sale will be utilised by Western Sydney University? Have they advised you of that?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No. I'd suggest that's a question for the vice-chancellor. Obviously, they have to use it for something that's consistent with their mission. It's a question for the university. I can't direct a university how to use it and I also—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You can ask them to furnish their commercial operations. You've got that power. You've got that functional power.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** As I said to you, there is nothing that I've seen so far that would cause me to ask them for an official report on where the \$24 million that you mentioned has gone. I suggest that's a question for the vice-chancellor as an autonomous governing institution.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, in an answer to supplementary question (1) (b) from 29 August 2025 budget estimates hearing, Western Sydney University stated that although the TAFE NSW sublease represents more than 25 per cent of the building, TAFE NSW occupation would be categorised as a university purpose. Are you aware of that? They're doing that to avoid triggering commercial rent liability to Canterbury-Bankstown council. Do you deem it that way, as well, the TAFE being a university purpose?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It's got nothing to do with me. It's between the—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Hang on, you're the TAFE and tertiary education Minister.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I've seen the points you've been raising on this for some time. Let's be very clear about it: That's a relationship between the council and the university. It's got absolutely nothing to do with me or TAFE.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** No. It does have something to do with you because—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It doesn't. TAFE is a tenant and we negotiated our lease with the university. It's up to them what their relationship with the council is.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Minister, is TAFE NSW—would you deem it as a university purpose?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** TAFE NSW is an educational institution. This relationship is between the university and the council.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Hang on, but the university is characterising—it does matter because you're subleasing. You're taking on a very big leasing arrangement with the University of Sydney. You're taking a big leasing arrangement with them. They're saying that TAFE NSW is a university purpose.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It's not my call. It's got nothing to do with the New South Wales Government. If you want to take it up with the Canterbury council, please do.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** It's not Canterbury-Bankstown council that's deeming it that. The university is stating that TAFE NSW is a university purpose. Do you agree with that? Is TAFE NSW a university purpose? Can it be characterised as a university purpose, Minister?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It has absolutely nothing to do with the New South Wales Government. It's not my decision, not my responsibility and nothing to do with me.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** And you have no view on that? What is TAFE NSW? Is it a university purpose?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'm here to answer questions as the Minister responsible for this region. I'm not here to give you my personal views.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Last time I recalled, you're the Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order: My point of order is the same but taken for a different member this time. Ms Mihailuk is not offering the Minister any time to answer the question and is speaking over him.

**The CHAIR:** I uphold the point of order.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Let's be very clear. TAFE is a tenant with the Western Sydney University. The university's arrangement with the council is between them. It's got nothing to do with the New South Wales Government.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I would have thought you'd take an interest in how it's categorising TAFE NSW.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I take an interest in getting a great TAFE in the tower at Bankstown, which is what we got—fantastic TAFE facility, accessible for people in the Bankstown area, providing wonderful training. That's my interest.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** It hasn't happened yet, Minister.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It's open. It's operating. It's there. I've been there. I've seen the students there. I've spoken to them.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Were they TAFE students or were they university students?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** TAFE students in the TAFE. In fact, it's a really exciting space. As I said before, I'm very happy to give you a tour.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I'd like you to, instead, give me an opportunity to peruse their commercial arrangements. You've got that power to do that. You've got a power to ask the university to furnish a report on their commercial arrangements.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'd suggest that—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I can't understand why you wouldn't take such an interest, being the Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'm interesting in delivering training for the people of New South Wales. In the Bankstown tower, that's what we're doing. It's a really exciting brand-new facility. Talk to anybody who works in these spaces, getting new facilities is great.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Can you remind me what the total cost of the contractual arrangement is between TAFE NSW and Western Sydney University of leasing for five years?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** As I said to you before, the overall budget for the fit-out and for the whole project was \$70 million. I'd ask Ms Read if there's any further information she could provide on the cost with the university. It may be commercial in confidence, but I'll ask Ms Read to answer that.

**CHLOE READ:** I think we covered this last session. The annual net rent is \$5.26 million.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Five point two?

**CHLOE READ:** It's 5.26, rounding up.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** That's a significant amount of money, isn't it, Minister?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes. As you'd probably be aware—or maybe not—government, when it goes into these things, do get assessments of value. We get independent assessments to see whether or not we're paying a fair rate. TAFE went through all the appropriate processes for this.

**The CHAIR:** Just finishing off on the questions I was asking in relation to the electrical apprenticeships, how many campuses in renewable energy zones now offer an in-person apprenticeship for Certificate III in Electrotechnology Electrician?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll ask TAFE to give details of that, but I'm aware that certainly in the Central West REZ we offer at Dubbo. That's why I was aware that we need another teacher there. We've got three, I think, but we need another one. We offer in a number of areas of New England, as well as in Newcastle. The list that we've got at the moment here in the REZs—I've got the full list here. I could provide you with a full list of where we offer electrotechnology, if you like.

**The CHAIR:** Can you tell me what the current relationships are that TAFE has with renewable energy proponents in order to deliver those placements?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We've just released recently a strategy for the renewable energy workforce, which we've been developing with the environment Minister's portfolio and as a whole-of-government strategy. We've got a number of things that we're working on with industry and also with other government agencies. Perhaps I could ask the department to run through some of the key parts of that.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** One of the key components which relates to what we're discussing in the Renewable Energy Skills Strategy is what's called local skills coordinators. They'll be based in each of the REZ regions and will actually help to coordinate local skill requirements and needs in a particular region. It might be that they're working with a TAFE provider in that particular region or a non-TAFE provider that is government funded and supported, to make sure that employers are connected indirectly with skills requirements in that area as well. There's also additional support for high school programs and some additional community support as well.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I would also like to see ambitious—there's potential for better use of group training organisations as well, because of the time frames in some of the projects, so that apprentices can actually complete their journey, potentially, on different projects. That's something that we're exploring as well with some of our work about how we could make that easier.

**The CHAIR:** If in Dubbo you're looking for a teacher, does that mean that students are then doing online—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, it doesn't. We have, as I understand it, three teachers there in Dubbo at the moment. We're dealing with all the apprentices. The issue that was brought to my attention was we had a lot of interest from high schools, which we weren't necessarily able to meet the demand.

**The CHAIR:** In terms of delivering the placements required in those renewable energy zones, they're actually going to renewable energy proponents?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll pass over to Ms Read, but when someone comes as an electrotech apprentice, we wouldn't necessarily prioritise them depending on whether they're working on residential or a big project.

**CHLOE READ:** Yes. Just to clarify, the apprenticeship relationship starts first with the employment. When they have employment, they then seek the training component. It's not like they come to us and say, "I want to be an apprentice," and then we say, "Cool, let's find you an employer." They find an employer and then the training is organised. If they're not in an apprenticeship course, then there are work placement and work engagement requirements that would be ours to assist with and make sure happen. But the vast majority of electrotech enrolments are apprenticeships.

**The CHAIR:** In terms of the teachers delivering these courses, again coming back to that one in Dubbo—and we've said it so many times now that maybe someone watching will suddenly apply.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes, that'd be nice.

**The CHAIR:** Are we then dependent on finding enough teachers in order to deliver sufficient courses for the demand?



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**CORRECTED**

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**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes, but we're very proactively working on attracting new teachers. Ms Read mentioned before our Paid to Learn success that we've had in that area. Because that program was going so well, we were able to access some more Federal funding to boost that, particularly focusing on the renewables and construction sector. We've had a lot of success with that. The other thing which we've done in a more limited sense is to try to work directly with industry to see if there are experienced people in industry who might want to come and teach at TAFE for a while as well. Particularly in mining areas, that's been something that we've tried to look at, because the wages that people are getting there are so high. There are some areas, not electrotech, but heavy vehicle, for example, where we'll get a teacher in and they'd be attracted out by industry fairly quickly. We are working very hard on that. Our Renewable Energy Skills Strategy is something which is—we've actually just released it, literally, in February. We are really working as a whole of government to try and make sure that we're linking all these different parts together to address this challenge.

**The CHAIR:** Can I move quickly to something different? I asked a lot of questions in past budget estimates about accessibility for people with disability across TAFE. What proportion of TAFE NSW campuses are now fully physically accessible—including workshops, laboratories and practical training facilities—rather than just classrooms and common areas?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** There are 1,700 buildings, and many of them are 50 to 100 years old. I'll ask Ms Read to answer that.

**CHLOE READ:** I don't—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Or we'll take it on notice.

**CHLOE READ:** We'll take on notice to give you what information we can about accessibility across a whole campus. As the Minister mentioned, we have 1,700 buildings, some of them heritage. As we move around doing improvements or upgrades to buildings across campuses, then that is absolutely part of the scope of works to make sure that we're progressively—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** As it was at Padstow, with that money that we spent there. We've just put in disability ramps there as well. We'll come back to you with an answer to the specific question.

**The CHAIR:** It's not just you. I do this in every estimates across all the different portfolios. I do understand that there are government buildings that are old. But if you're a person with disability who wants to access education like everyone else, that doesn't really cut it.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Totally legitimate. We do work very closely—TAFE's student population, we have a higher number of students with a disability than most other educational providers, so it is something we take very seriously.

**CHLOE READ:** It's nearly 12 per cent as of 2024.

**The CHAIR:** I might come back this afternoon on that. How many disability teacher consultants are currently employed across the network?

**CHLOE READ:** Ninety-seven.

**The CHAIR:** What is that ratio of consultants to students with disability?

**CHLOE READ:** I'm going to take that on notice, noting that the provision of education to students with disability relies on that principle of reasonable adjustment. There will be students who identify as having a disability but who don't need a particular adjustment or who don't need an adjustment that requires a disability teacher consultant. For example, some students with neurodiversity might not choose to apply for any provisions but may identify themselves as having a disability.

**The CHAIR:** Is there a waitlist for disability support services at any campus?

**CHLOE READ:** I will take that on notice, unless you have anything.

**JULIE TICKLE:** We'll take it on notice to confirm, but not to my knowledge. The other point that's important here is it's not just the disability teacher consultants that provide service to our students with disability. There are quite a lot of other roles, as well, that provide services.

**The CHAIR:** The disability assistants?

**JULIE TICKLE:** Yes, the disability assistants are sitting with students in classes a lot of the time. The disability teacher consultants specialise in a certain area of disability, and the disability assistants sit with the students in classes a lot of the time.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The CHAIR:** I understand you have a Disability Inclusion Action Plan, and one of the metrics of that plan is the number of TAFE campuses that meet accessibility standards. What are you doing to ensure that you perform against that self-assigned metric?

**CHLOE READ:** As I mentioned, wherever we need to do works to a campus, we make sure that we're considering accessibility across that campus. The Minister mentioned Padstow, but obviously we do works across the whole range. Often we might offer similar courses at campuses that are near each other and so, where that's an option, we would explore that with individuals to make sure they got the right provision for them.

**The CHAIR:** So 97 consultants across 154 campuses. How many disability assistants?

**JULIE TICKLE:** We'll take that on notice.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Just noting that our completion rates for students with a disability was at the highest completion rate since 2017, at 46 per cent. Obviously, again, there's work to go there, but it's good to see it's on the up.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Minister, if I could go back to cancellation of courses in construction industries. The cabinet-making course I was referring to was at Lidcombe TAFE. I'm a little surprised, Ms Read, you didn't remember that, because I gather this was raised at estimates last time. Minister, I thought you would've been aware of that too. I wonder if you can tell me—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Was that in the past year?

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Last semester. Of course, last semester, we know that intakes were frozen for a raft of trade courses, especially electricians. Courses where students were turned away included carpentry, plumbing and electrical fitting, because they were at capacity. How many students that were turned away in semester two of last year have enrolled this year?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Can I say, firstly, we don't turn any students away. We find somewhere else or we give them an avenue to take on the course.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Minister, when these reports were put out, parents and students were reading in the press—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Particularly on electrotechnology, some of the stuff they were reading in the press was incorrect.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** On notice, can you provide me with the copies of the press releases and interviews that you did to correct that information?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I responded at the time to—the one that I saw at the time was the one around electrotechnology.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** On notice, can you provide me with what you put out, especially in relation to carpentry and plumbing?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** All my press releases are on the Premier's website, so you can have a look at those. I would've made some other media comments about it.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Minister, what I'm asking you to do is engage directly with the reports. You're saying that we find another pathway.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I do.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** In concrete terms, I turn up and I want to do carpentry and my local TAFE says, "Sorry, there's no place for you in carpentry." What is that person directed towards?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** They won't say, "Sorry, no place". They'll say, "We will help you to do carpentry. If this current class is full—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Talk me through it. What does that look like in practical terms?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will ask Ms Read to talk you through it. What we do is we work individually with the person to give them the pathway.

**CHLOE READ:** For example, there might be a related course they can do.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What does a related course to carpentry look like? I guess this is the gateway question, isn't it? If I want to be a carpenter, what is the related course if carpentry is not available?

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**CORRECTED**

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**Mr STEVE WHAN:** By the way, on the electrical one, at the time that press report came out—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sorry, Minister, we're talking about carpentry.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** You did mention electrical before. At the time the press report came out, there were 25 campuses with space. There were opportunities there.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** How many of those were in the New England region of New South Wales, Minister?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** There was another one—perhaps Tamworth.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** How many of those campuses you talked about were in the New England region of New South Wales?

**CHLOE READ:** I think we did provide the list on notice in response.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We did actually go through this last estimates.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What's a related course to carpentry, Ms Read?

**CHLOE READ:** We're speaking generally about where someone might turn up. If there is a related—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** No, I'm asking what is a related course to carpentry.

**CHLOE READ:** If there is a related course—they may be coming from a particular level. They may wish to enrol in a more broad construction course. We might also find a nearby—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** If first year carpentry is unavailable, what does a student do?

**CHLOE READ:** We might find a nearby campus where they could do that. We may offer them the opportunity to start doing some of the units that they would do as part of the full qualification and enrol later in the full qualification. We may also have the opportunity to put on another class, depending on where we are in the term.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** How often do you put on new classes? On notice, can you provide a list of how many new classes last semester and this semester were put on due to demand at TAFEs?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** They've certainly got a much better chance of finding a place with 400 more teachers and many more permanent teachers than they did under a previous government which halved the teaching staff.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Which is why I'm asking, on notice, please give us a list of all the new classes put on last semester and this semester.

**CHLOE READ:** I should be clear that we don't offer a number of classes at the beginning of term. If we're offering carpentry and then a number of students come along, we fill a class. And then another number of students come along and we fill another class.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** How many students do you need to put on a new class?

**CHLOE READ:** That varies depending on the subject.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It depends on the class.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** On notice, can you please provide a list of how many new classes were put on due to enrolment demands last semester and this semester?

**CHLOE READ:** What I'm saying is that additional classes are not quantified like that, because we would run a different number of classes for each intake of students depending on how many students there are.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Then, on notice, can you provide exactly how you responded to higher than expected enrolments to accommodate students who wish to enrol?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** At which TAFE specifically?

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** At every TAFE in New South Wales, Minister.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Ms Carter, if this helps, and Ms Read, I have had students say to me they've gone into certs like joinery and wood machining, which align in those areas. I have met some students who have reported that.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, if I could raise the issue of the TAFE working from home fraud. I note that TAFE NSW Cisco applications are used to monitor teachers' logins. How often are they checked to ensure that they're actually working from home and not just going to Westfield, as the teachers say?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Can I start off by saying that I haven't heard of anything which is called the "TAFE working from home fraud" that you referred to. I'm not sure where you've got that terminology from.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** It's not an official title, Minister. It's a subject of great discussion with working from home arrangements.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** It's a subjective title that you've just made up. Are you with your former Federal colleagues who think you shouldn't be able to work from home? That went well.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** It's an inquiry into the Cisco application—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** We're happy with working from home, Minister.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The reports of going to Westfield are coming from TAFE teachers.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will ask Ms Read to address whether or not—if you're a teacher, you've got some set duties. They are a little bit hard to—you're fairly well noticed if you're not doing them, shall I say. But I'll hand over to Ms Read.

**CHLOE READ:** I'm not entirely sure what you're particularly referring to. I know that our teachers can work from home as a part of their "related duties" time, so Ms Tickle might give us some detail on that.

**JULIE TICKLE:** If they're a permanent teacher, they work 35 hours a week—15 hours related duties and 20 hours teaching. Of the 15 hours of related duties, five are able to be done away from a campus. That's in their enterprise agreement.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I've only been able to find one reference to fraud, I've been advised, on the internet here, and it seems to have happened while the Coalition was in government—involving TAFE.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Are there any other checks, in terms of the TAFE NSW Cisco application, that are available for people to demonstrate they are working, in terms of a portable workplace?

**CHLOE READ:** I think what you're referring to on the Cisco application is an application that allows, say, if I'm not on the TAFE network, I need to use it for certain things—to get to our records management system, for example. I don't need that application to get to all of TAFE's systems, and nor would I be using it every moment that I was working and not on a TAFE network. For example, I'm here today, and I can do a whole range of things without using the Cisco application to log on. I think that it might be useful if you want to give me the information that you have about that out of session, or here, and we could try to look into what it is that you are looking at.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, in terms of EVET tenders, when will the next round of EVET tenders open?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will ask the education department. EVET operates in high schools, so I will ask them to answer that question. Have you got that, Jeremy?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** I don't have the detail, but I'm happy to take it on notice. We did go through a procurement process last year, though, so I don't expect that a tender will be coming out in coming months. We will take it on notice.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Further to that, why did the department describe the tender process as "undercooked" in November 2025?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** I'm not sure what you are referring to.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Have we got confidence in the tender process in place today?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Can you tell us who described it as that?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I haven't got it. Feedback has come from providers to us in terms of their experience on this.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** That wasn't terminology we use, but if you've got a document or particular person I can call and follow up with on their perception of that, I'm happy to do that.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I think this has previously been raised: This is relating to a provider such as Bedford College. They report, "Advised tenders would open in November 2025 only to later be told they may not open until as late as 2027." I note, Minister, that is a two-year period.

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**CORRECTED**

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**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Obviously, I think the department has just answered that we did go through a tender process last year. I'm not sure where Bedford College fitted into that. I will have to refer that to the department.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** I'm aware that the department did meet with Bedford College towards the end of last year, and they discussed the procurement process and provided Bedford College with some advice in relation to that. I believe Bedford College was also going to follow up with other partners on their end as well. We're happy to take it on notice and provide any further details in relation to that.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The question is, should the EVET tender process be conducted on a regular annual cycle rather than what we have just discussed here today, requiring providers to wait multiple years before opportunities?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I will ask the department to answer that. Obviously, there's a benefit to having a reasonable period of time for people to conduct their operations in this space, but I'll ask the department.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** The Minister describes that really well. You'd want to give some certainty. These processes are whole-of-government processes, so you will find that the cycle comes before that 12-month period has even elapsed. You want to give certainty to the provider. We wouldn't be recommending an annual process.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Would not.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** No. You want to strike a balance between making sure the quality is strong and you are awarding along those tender guidelines but, also, you are getting continuity of service provision. Otherwise, you will be in a cycle where you're just going to tender repeatedly.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I am advised that your shadow Minister raised this with me, and I did write back to him about the Bedford College example specifically. It would have taken into account the discussions with the department.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, when will the northern beaches campus engage a head teacher and other key personnel?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** In which area?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Northern beaches campus.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, which area of curriculum?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Relating to that campus.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I think we probably need to go through the new operating model, because the new operating model for TAFE has gone to a faculty model. Head teachers—areas where they are located have changed. I am aware that in one area on the northern beach campus—in hospitality is my memory of it—there used to be a head teacher physically closer by than there is now, but the head teacher arrangements have changed a bit because of the new operating model and because we've moved to faculties. I suspect that might be where that question is coming from. I might ask Ms Read or one of the TAFE staff to hand over on that.

**CHLOE READ:** That is correct. Not every campus for every subject will have a head teacher who is based in that campus. They work across a number of campuses as part of the statewide faculty structure.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In the absence of a head teacher relating to this campus, what impact does that have on students?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, there is a head teacher.

**CHLOE READ:** There is a head teacher, yes.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The head teachers relate to the subject that's being taught. There is a head teacher; they're just not physically on that campus. But there are teachers on that campus. It's not for the students. In fact, the whole idea of having a faculty model—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In the absence of the head teacher from campus, there is an email address. Is that right?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, they are very regularly—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of support and guidance, talk to the email.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Not at all.

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**CORRECTED**

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**CHLOE READ:** Students would engage with their teacher for support and guidance or with our student support services.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes, they don't go to the head teacher.

**CHLOE READ:** They'd be unlikely to be using the head teacher in that capacity.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The head teacher's relationship is generally with the teachers, as I understand it. They have very close contact with all of their teaching staff.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** On this one, is this relevant head teacher that you have identified available on campus at any time?

**CHLOE READ:** Yes.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** They go around.

**CHLOE READ:** The head teachers travel around the campuses. Mr Hawkins might add something.

**MARK HAWKINS:** Thank you for the question. We'd need to know the specific discipline area.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I am fairly confident that it's cooking. Do you know?

**MARK HAWKINS:** It may be cooking. A head teacher can be responsible for looking after what we call multiple teaching sections. That can be dependent, obviously, on the size and the number of enrolments at a particular location. Fundamentally, their role is there to lead a team of teachers, and they are readily available. It doesn't necessarily mean they will be physically onsite at every given hour of every single day, but they are very much there to support the teaching section in regard to the operations and running of that teaching section. If you wanted to provide the specific discipline area, we're happy to look into that further.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** From memory, this has been an area of discussion at earlier estimates, so I'm surprised that we're not a little bit more prepared today on this one. We're still getting feedback—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I actually think I know exactly the complainant you are talking about, but—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Minister, I think you have visited this campus—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I have visited the campus.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** —and you spoke about that.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I have visited the campus, absolutely.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The head teacher is still missing.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, this is a misunderstanding on your behalf of how the operating model works. We've moved to a faculty structure. There has never been, by the way, a head teacher in every campus of a TAFE—never. The idea of moving to a faculty model is that we now have statewide ability for all of our teachers to be delivering consistently, across the State, better resourcing, better ordering of equipment and all of those things. There's a huge amount of advantage in it.

In fact, what we have probably done is take the half-built model that the previous Government left us with One TAFE and turned it into a proper statewide training system: the biggest vocational delivery—and best—in Australia. It is something which meant that we'd changed. The faculty model helped us to get to that stage, and it's really working through. It's simply wrong to suggest that you have to have a head teacher. Head teachers relate to the area of delivery, so there is a head teacher for construction—or whatever—who works with that campus. There is a head teacher in that cooking and hospitality area. There is not a position at all, and never has been, that is "the head teacher, northern beaches campus".

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of course cancellation, we also have reports that courses have been cancelling with three weeks prior notice to students. Students are told they must study at a different campus or transfer completely. Is that the TAFE approach to students—a three-week notice of a course cancellation?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Under your previous Government, sometimes they got one day notice. What we do is, when we don't have the enrolments to actually deliver a course—Ms Read's dealt with this in some detail already today, but when we don't have the enrolments to fill a course, we work with the students to make sure that we're offering the opportunity for them somewhere.

I can give you an example raised by one of your colleagues about Moss Vale. One of your colleagues in the lower House leapt into the media and said, "This is terrible. Nineteen people have missed out on a course." In fact, the truth was that we had six enrollees for the courses, which was too small, and we worked with each of them

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**CORRECTED**

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to give them an alternative pathway, and with their parents. TAFE went through that process of solving that problem for those students, and did so as soon as the issue arose. I give them credit for the fact that, obviously, you can't run a course if—you're not running a course for no students. It's not reasonable to think that you might run a course for a very small number of students, but what we'd hope to do over time is provide a little bit more certainty for areas, and particularly regional New South Wales.

I went out to Broken Hill a while ago because there were concerns about the delivery of some of the metalwork courses there. What happened out of that was that TAFE went out, talked to industry, said to them, "What's your demand? Let's structure it so that we can deliver this course for you in a particular year. We may not be able to do it every year." In other areas—in the New England area, I'm aware that we had some complaints about some courses in, I think, motor vehicle. But what had actually happened was that word had gone around that there wasn't a course, so employers weren't actually bringing people on. We want industry to talk to us to say, "We've got the demand. We'll work with you to plan for it and deliver for it."

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Shouldn't student satisfaction be a top priority in terms of the TAFE offering in New South Wales?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I believe it is. I believe we survey for that, but I'll ask Ms Read to talk about our surveying for that.

**CHLOE READ:** Student satisfaction is really important to TAFE, and we understand student satisfaction in a number of ways, not least the survey that the Minister referenced. Student satisfaction is broken into a number of different elements. There's satisfaction with the training received, satisfaction with the provider—as in us—and then there's also aspects like whether the student got a benefit from the training and whether they got what they wanted from the training. Actually, our discussion earlier when we were talking about completions is really important, because you see quite a high level of positive response to "whether I got what I wanted from the training", even where students don't complete. That's not limited to TAFE; that's across the VET system. What that means is that students are taking on courses for a particular reason that we need to unpack a bit, but often it's that thing that Mr Kurucz talked about earlier, which is that there's a number of units in that course that will help them, but they don't need the whole of the delivery. But yes, student satisfaction is very important to us, and across the range of those metrics we're in the 90 per cents for most of them.

**The CHAIR:** Just a couple of questions back on the disability teacher consultants—what is the current case load for DTC?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll ask TAFE to take that one, please.

**CHLOE READ:** I might need to take that on notice. Given that the disability teacher consultants are a specialised support, there will be a referral that will vary depending on the numbers of students with disability, the types of those disability, and they obviously deal with physical and chronic or medical conditions, mental health conditions, deaf or hard of hearing, blind or low vision, the range of learning disability and acquired brain injury. They assess the educational needs of students, ensure the support is met. They provide support for our teachers with ensuring that those adjustments to teaching methodology or assessments or curriculum are made to make sure that they meet the needs of students. They support also with reasonable adjustment plans, liaise with people like Auslan interpreters and note-takers and helping staff, generally, with how they support those students. That's a way of saying they could be doing a whole range of different things, and that case load will vary across those things.

**The CHAIR:** Taking that into account, I think it would be useful, if it's possible, to provide that case load for each of the last 10 years, say, so that we can get an idea as to how that is tracking, rather than just looking at it in isolation.

**JULIE TICKLE:** I think we would try to provide as much information as we could to help you. I would just say, though, that it's not like every student has the same needs, or at the same level. A disability consultant might, for example, liaise and arrange Auslan interpretation, and for another student, it might be much more targeted and take a longer period of time across their course. We'll see what data we do have to provide for you on notice.

**The CHAIR:** That would be very useful.

**CHLOE READ:** We certainly know that there were 14,000 students referred to a disability teacher consultant in 2025, so we could try and get that number for you, across years.

**The CHAIR:** That would be useful too.

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**CORRECTED**

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**CHLOE READ:** I would say, though, as the numbers of students with disability generally increases, we are seeing particular types of disability more prominent. That's across the general population as well as at TAFE, but that might change the profile of what those numbers mean in terms of work.

**The CHAIR:** Are you actively recruiting for more DTCs at the moment? Do we have enough?

**CHLOE READ:** I would need to take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** How many disability assistants have had their employment converted to permanent from casual in line with the latest EA?

**CHLOE READ:** We have converted a lot of people, but I don't think we have a breakdown.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** We might have to get the breakdown on that.

**The CHAIR:** If you could provide that on notice, that would be excellent. Thank you.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Minister, how many applications were received for the local government apprenticeship program as at 31 December last year?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** The local government apprenticeship program is run by Minister Hoenig's department.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** So you've got no oversight over that?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** No, we don't have an involvement in that. We do provide training to a number of them once they're there, but we don't actually go through that process.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** So you provide training to a number—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Through TAFE, obviously.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I didn't think it was your backyard, Minister.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Unlike the 1,000 government apprenticeships, which our department is running, we don't run the local government program.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Are they able to undertake training with RTOs?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll answer the bit on TAFE training and then over to the RTOs.

**CHLOE READ:** On the local government piece, we supported more than 360 apprentices and trainees in 2025. We are obviously looking to train more in 2026, but those numbers depend on what those apprentices and trainees want to do and the employer that they're placed with.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** With respect to the New South Wales government apprenticeships—

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I think the question around the RTOs is one for Minister Hoenig.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sure. I'll follow up with him. So with New South Wales government apprenticeships, are government-employed apprentices permitted to train with private or not-for-profit RTOs?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Yes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What's your relationship with the Commonwealth Government? For example, naval apprentices—are they Commonwealth somehow or are they TAFE?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** That's an interesting one.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Or are they civilian employees, like the ship fitters at Garden Island?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** For example, our trainee of the year a few years ago worked at Garden Island, but she did her training with a private RTO—or it might have been with the company. But certainly there are areas of Commonwealth employment where they would be accessing New South Wales training providers or TAFE. I couldn't reel off the top of my head which ones they might be. But if you look more broadly at, say, the energy sector, we're certainly involved in providing training in a large part of that sector as well.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Smart and Skilled—how many providers were audited or monitored in 2025?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I'll ask the department to answer that question.



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**CORRECTED**

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**JEREMY KURUCZ:** I'll take on notice the number of providers that have been audited, but we're in regular contact with all our providers as part of contract management through Smart and Skilled.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Could you also have a look for us at how many contracts were suspended or terminated?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** I think we do have that figure here.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** We have that information.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Do you have figures about student complaints that were received?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I can tell you the figures for Smart and Skilled.

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** Can we give the figure first for Smart and Skilled? Since 2015 there have been 117 contract terminations—57 the result of performance monitoring; 28 insolvency; 26 no longer being registered with ASQA, which is the Federal authority; and six as a result of adverse ASQA decisions. If you want a breakdown of the years, I'm sure we can provide that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Government questions?

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Yes, I have a question. Minister, could you please provide an update to the Committee on how the Labor Government is delivering on its election commitment to hire an additional 1,000 public sector apprentices and trainees?

**Mr STEVE WHAN:** As I briefly mentioned before, the 1,000 new apprentices and trainees across the New South Wales public sector is something that the Government is very proud of. It was an election commitment that was made leading into the last election. On Monday, we actually hit 900 apprentices and trainees commencing with the program across more than 50 State agencies. Fifty-four per cent of the commencements so far have been in regional New South Wales, which has been allowing participants to get skills training for a successful career pathway while really importantly remaining in their communities. Of course, it isn't just about getting students in the door. We want to make sure they're supported to learn and see their training through to completion. As I again mentioned earlier, we've got a retention rate at the moment of over 90 per cent. I put that down to trainees getting good conditions, good wages and good supervision as they're going through these processes and courses.

These are really life-changing opportunities for a lot of people. It is something that we take very seriously, because we did see over the 12 years of the previous Government apprenticeships and traineeships plummeting. Completions dropped by over 20,000, commencements dropped by more than 40,000, and apprentices and trainees in training dropped by more than 30,000. So the privatised skill system and TAFE in the commercial market just wasn't producing the results in this area. That's why we are backing the apprentices and trainees through government employment and also working with the Federal Government on fee-free TAFE and the National Skills Agreement to improve completions.

We talked a bit about the support for people with a disability. One of the really important things we did was remove the cap on needs-based loadings for people who are coming through. We've increased the travel and accommodation allowances. We are delivering free supervisor training workshops to ensure workplace supervisors have the skills to mentor apprentices. One thing I heard very loudly from apprentices as we did the A&T review was that their supervisor was absolutely critical for them, and a supervisor who understood how to deal with the generation who is there in the community as well at the moment.

We're seeing some encouraging progress: a 7 per cent increase in the apprenticeship completion rate since 2023; an 8 percentage point increase in full qualification completion rates, the highest since 2018; a 41.7 per cent drop in total government-funded training withdrawals, the lowest number since 2017; and increases in key areas like construction trades and electrotechnology, which we talked about earlier in this place. We also don't want to forget some of those human areas, like early childhood education completions, which are going up. The big work that we've got to do is in areas like getting more nurses in hospitals and aged care. Of course, there's a lot of work still to do, but we're making good progress. Could I also table the NSW Renewable Energy Skills Strategy for the Committee as well?

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. That brings our time with the Minister to an end. Thank you very much for your time.

**(The Minister withdrew.)**

**(Luncheon adjournment)**

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**CORRECTED**

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**The CHAIR:** Welcome back. Can I just pick up on the disability assistants and teacher consultants point again? In relation to those disability assistants, I asked before how many of them had been converted from casual to permanent now. I don't think I got a number back on that.

**CHLOE READ:** I think we said we would take it on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. In terms of the number of them, is it around 500? Are we looking at—

**JULIE TICKLE:** Yes. I got that for you in the break. There's just over 500 of those that have been paid in our payroll over the last payroll period. They're not all full FTE, though. Disability assistants are often casual. Sometimes they'll do that work, and they'll do other work and other administration work as well. Sometimes they are our general assistants or education administration specialists—support people, sorry, not specialists—and also they do disability assistance. They do a range of activities for us.

**The CHAIR:** What is the process, then, of conversion? Because I understand that there was a scheme to convert them into permanent. Is that permanent part-time? What's that looking like?

**JULIE TICKLE:** That legislation—the Closing Loopholes legislation—absolutely depends on the hours that they have done over a period of time and whether there's ongoing work. Some of them might be converted permanent part-time to a 0.5 or a 0.4 load, whatever is the requirement. There has been considerable work over the last year and last semester and, so far, this semester to look at what work is available and who can be converted. There have been some converted, but I will take that on notice because I don't have the number.

**The CHAIR:** Do those disability assistants tend to work with—I'm imagining, for example, a student that enrolls who already has a person who they have been using to assist them in other aspects. Can that person become a disability assistant, or are disability assistants always employed originally or found, I guess, by TAFE and then allocated out?

**JULIE TICKLE:** Like any other role, they apply for the role, and they get the role. In some cases, we have students come to us that have been using assistants from outside providers. We don't use those people. We use our own disability assistants. Some people, though—some students with disability—do come onto a TAFE campus and have assistants provided from outside providers. It really depends on what jobs are available and what they have applied for as to how they get recruited. Definitely, though, I understand what the teachers do. Certainly, when I was a teacher, if there's a student that goes through a course—particularly if it's a multi-year course—we do try and provide them with the same assistant, if that's working for them. It just depends on the student preference and who's available.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, that's really handy. Forgive my ignorance but is there an overlap, then, with those students who are also on NDIS and have a package that provides assistance? Is there some sort of interaction with that funding at a TAFE level or is it just simply if you're already covered by NDIS, you don't need a TAFE disability assistant so there's no interaction between the two schemes?

**JULIE TICKLE:** I will take that on notice to make sure I'm being accurate, but my understanding is it really depends on the student and what support they have externally and what support they receive from TAFE. It is a range of things that are considered, but we can take it on notice unless you have any additional information.

**The CHAIR:** Back on the conversion of disability assistants, I understand that there was an error that TAFE made in relation to the number of hours that they were being given. Is that correct? They were being offered incorrect hours which weren't in line with the casual hours that they've been working over the previous six months in order to then convert them to permanent.

**JULIE TICKLE:** I don't know the answer to that, but I would say that it's likely that there have been some errors made because we've converted—I think it's around 3,500 employees from casual to permanent, and each one of those employees is different. Under the Closing Loopholes legislation, they approach the employer. The employee approaches the employer and requests to be made permanent. Then there's a process that's followed where we consider each of the requirements in the legislation and consider what work is available, the pattern of work that they've done, and they are converted based on those conversations. Each person is different. I'm sure we did make some errors but if that's the case, if errors have been made, the person can actually ask for it to be relooked at, and we have had quite a few people do that. I'm told as well that some of the disability assistants that have been converted have actually requested to go back to casual hours as well, because it is a choice. It's the same with any of our employees that are being converted. They don't have to be. They can stay casual if they'd like to be. Some of them have gone back and said, "Actually, I'd prefer to be casual because it gives me more flexibility."

**The CHAIR:** Fair enough. In relation to the disability teacher consultants, what's the average age of those consultants? Do you know?

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**CHLOE READ:** We'd need to take that on notice, I think.

**JULIE TICKLE:** Yes, need to take that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** That would be useful. I'm just curious as to the ability to recruit and to keep a certain number of those consultants. I think I asked you before if you were actively looking for more. Is it difficult to find people to fill that role?

**JULIE TICKLE:** I don't know the answer to that question. I could find out. I just looked on our current advertisements and there's not any being recruited right now, but I'm not sure. Different roles are harder to recruit for different reasons. It depends on the campus, and how many people are in the area. I'd have to take it on notice.

**The CHAIR:** Perhaps you could also take on notice, just in relation to the disability assistants, how many have requested conversion and how many have had that granted or are still waiting?

**JULIE TICKLE:** Yes, sure. It's a work in progress. Under the legislation, we respond to people as they ask us. I can give you a point in time on that, sure.

**The CHAIR:** That would be very useful. Just back on the disability inclusion plan and the 12 per cent figure that you gave me for facilities that were accessible, can you explain—

**CHLOE READ:** No, I gave you—sorry. I think we got crossed over.

**The CHAIR:** That's what I wanted to clarify.

**CHLOE READ:** Nearly 12 per cent of students have a disability at TAFE.

**The CHAIR:** All right, because I thought—

**CHLOE READ:** I took on notice whether we have good detail on the whole campus being accessible.

**The CHAIR:** Given that the disability inclusion plan has that metric in there, was there work done when that plan was developed to work out what the percentage is at the beginning of the plan?

**CHLOE READ:** Ms Tickle might have that.

**JULIE TICKLE:** No, I don't think there was because there's so many campuses and each has a completely different environment. There have certainly been concentrations in certain areas through the plan, but I'm not aware that there was an audit or a stocktake taken in terms of the various campuses. I know that as we build new campuses—the example of Padstow before is one of these—any refits, it's taken into account there. Then we're moving through campuses. But I'm not aware that there was a stocktake, no.

**The CHAIR:** It's one of the flaws in the legislation, I think. There's the obligation to have an inclusion plan, then an obligation to monitor and report against it, but there's no obligation to actually meet your plan, which is, obviously, not specific to TAFE. That's the way it's been set up. But do you have any plan or targets as to how you might improve that metric over time?

**JULIE TICKLE:** One thing that we have done, and we're continuing to do this year, is look at a really standard process for something that's called PEEPs, which is Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans for staff and students with disabilities. Each campus has an emergency management plan, but students with a disability and staff with a disability have these PEEPs, which are individual. That helps us to understand what's required for each person that has a disability based on the campus that they're located at, so it's very specific and customised to each person on each campus. We've started standardising that process and really being quite mindful of any that are missing, any gaps, making sure that that's up-to-date. We've started there in case of emergency, and then we'll continue to roll out other things as we go.

**The CHAIR:** You would expect that, as facilities get more accessible, that that number of special plans would be reduced or just that they would change?

**JULIE TICKLE:** No, they all have a special plan because if someone has a disability, we need to understand what it means to help them evacuate in the case of an emergency. What I guess I'm saying is by looking at those plans and having a look at our spread of students and employees with disability, it just will help us prioritise the campuses that we need to look at.

**The CHAIR:** Understood. In an ideal world, people could evacuate like everyone else, but often those evacuation plans are required because there are obstacles to being able to just evacuate—for example, steps and things instead of lifts. Maybe that does also give some indication as to the extent of accessibility.

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**JULIE TICKLE:** I think it can also be if they require assistance. It might not be about steps. It might be, but it might actually be that the person requires assistance and we just pay more special attention to make sure that they're okay and they're clear of where the evacuation points are.

**The CHAIR:** I understand that. When we talk about fully accessible as opposed to assisted accessible, that's what we're talking about. We're talking about people being able to autonomously move around without needing that assistance. Again, you might think that those plans would have some interesting insights into just how accessible our TAFE campuses are. I will come back on that. Do you have any other physical accessibility metrics that are available? We talk about that one. Is there anything else that's able to give us any insight into the level of accessibility?

**JULIE TICKLE:** In particular around campus environments, do you mean?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, for physical accessibility requirements.

**JULIE TICKLE:** Not in front of me, but I can certainly take it on notice and provide what we can.

**The CHAIR:** I understand that disability advisory groups were being formed within TAFE. Is that correct?

**JULIE TICKLE:** We have a range of employee networks at TAFE. There is a really active ability network that is actually sponsored by Mr Hawkins, my colleague at the table here. Each one of those employee networks runs with employees with lived experience. They contribute to the plans. The ability network in particular had a lot of contribution and consultation around the DIAP. Within those networks, there are often groups that look at things like accessibility or any of the elements that are in each of our plans. They form communities of practice and they work with the support functions, whether it be recruitment or procurement or whomever, to make sure that their needs, requirements and wants are being listened to.

**The CHAIR:** Is that only employees, not students as well?

**JULIE TICKLE:** The ones I just referred to are employee networks. That's right.

**The CHAIR:** I'm just looking at your disability action plan. Whenever I'm asking these questions—and I know that you are not alone in agencies that are not moving as quickly as I want them to on accessibility issues. It says very clearly in your disability action plan that the goal is for students, employees and community members with disability to be able to attend and fully participate in learning events and other activities at TAFE NSW, and that people with disability know where they are and can find their way around TAFE NSW campuses safely, independently and with dignity. That is the goal. Then, in the action plan, it says that to achieve that you will improve the physical infrastructure and digital accessibility at TAFE NSW. It worries me, then, that we don't really seem to have an actual plan or anything in place to actively be improving the accessibility of campuses. Is there any modelling that has been done? Are there any budget bids put in? How seriously are we taking that goal?

**CHLOE READ:** Underneath the action plan, we then aim to build out a series of actions. That sounds a bit weird: Under an action plan we'll have actions. It's specific work that we will do over time that will progress the plan. You'd appreciate it won't be every single action in the plan at once. I know that, working from memory, under the plan, the audit of facilities is one of the pieces that's on our radar as we do our campus master planning and work our way around the State, understanding our facilities as a way of understanding where we need to pay attention to physical accessibility. Similarly, in the digital space, it's the same. We've certainly got, in our new course development process, inclusive design principles worked into that process of producing curriculum and learning materials for students so that it's built into everything new. Obviously, we then have to do almost like an audit again and go back and say, "Okay, how do we look at all the things that we have and make sure that they are as accessible as they need to be?" Some of those older materials we might need to fix up, and similarly with systems.

**The CHAIR:** Again, just in relation to disability advisory groups, this is something that was pulled out in relation to—it says that 2020 to 2022 achievements under the Disability Inclusion Action Plan include establishing advisory groups, plural, to review and evaluate campus facilities, workplace and learning environments, ensuring compliance with current accessibility requirements and planning for future improvements. Do those groups not exist anymore?

**CHLOE READ:** The year 2022 is a bit before my time. Do you have advice, Ms Tickle?

**JULIE TICKLE:** I don't know if they all still exist in the form that you've just described there. I know that there are groups looking at various aspects of the plan—yes, definitely. We held a round table last year on accessibility—in particular, digital accessibility—and there were lots of insights that came from that. I was actually speaking to one of the network members around some of the changes that came out of that. We've got a long way to go on this. I will say that. We're really committed to continuing the work that we've done. It's nowhere

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near finished. I think people with disability working at TAFE and students coming to TAFE should expect us to be doing more than we're doing, but we are moving forward in ways that are improving the experience.

Employment and recruitment, for example, is something that we've invested more resourcing into and had people working with some of our employees who have really generously provided their time to support the recruitment process coming into TAFE. We've also invested some additional time and resources into upskilling our line managers so that they can better support their employees with disability, and running some additional professional development and capability development courses on working with people with disability. We're continuing to do that.

**The CHAIR:** What's the process if I'm a student with a disability, particularly a physical disability? I feel like that's where often we're not doing a lot of the work that we need to do because it costs money. Again, I understand: You're dealing with very old buildings. When I ask this question of Mr Dizdar in the context of public schools, I'm always told that if a student needs something in order to be able to go to that school, then it will be provided. Is it the same in TAFE? What happens if someone with a disability wants to go to TAFE and they want to go to a particular TAFE near them for a course, and it's not an accessible building for them? What happens?

**CHLOE READ:** I think a couple of things. Mr Dizdar obviously has to take every student. They have an enrolment obligation. We view similarly that anyone who wants to come to TAFE should be able to come to TAFE. As I said, we would be working with that student on their particular needs and the course that they wanted to enrol in. You mentioned a particular TAFE. It may be that there's a TAFE nearby that is already accessible for them. It would be really individual because obviously the works you would need to do for someone who needed access, particularly types of physical access, might take some time. Regardless of the funding, they just might take a number of months to complete. We'd be working with that student on what it is that we could do to ensure that they could enrol in TAFE, that they could attend classes somewhere suitable and that they had the support that they need.

**The CHAIR:** Have there been any suggestions or plans for some sort of restructure of the teams that provide support to students around disability to merge them into a bigger group within TAFE that deals with other vulnerable cohorts of people?

**CHLOE READ:** We just, at the start of this year, put the new operating model in place that has our Student Support and Community Group together. Ms Tickle might want to talk about the different elements of that group and how they're structured, to answer that question.

**The CHAIR:** And just particularly whether that's then resulting in there being less specialised resources for students with disability.

**JULIE TICKLE:** Putting that group together was very purposeful in terms of having the faculty model, so you have, sort of, a statewide faculty with a community local focus. The Student Support and Community Group is designed to do just that. The disability teacher consultants and the disability assistants sit in that group, as well as other things like Aboriginal student support, for example, sits in that group. That was very intentional. I think the best way to look at this, though, is it's not just one group looking after students or employees with disability. We have all of the roles around them and we call them the wraparound roles supporting them. Their teachers support them. The people that work in the sections in our administration area support them. We have dedicated roles on campuses which are called Manager, TAFE Services or TAFE Services Coordinators. They understand the students and the enrolment pattern, and who's coming and going, and they understand the physical environment.

I think we have a lot of people looking after all of our students, regardless of what their needs are. You did ask if there was consideration to group them together. What I would add is we have a dedicated diversity and inclusion team that is sitting in the People Group, in my group, that actually has people working with all of these networks and supporting the implementation of our plans. So there are a number of teams, both in the Learning and Teaching Group, in our Student Support and Community Group, and also in the People Group, looking after people with needs, and changing needs as they go through TAFE.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Ms Read, I suspect these questions are to you. I'm really trying to explore the issue that we were talking about before the lunch break in relation to course enrolments and what happens for students who might exceed the numbers that were planned to offer a particular course. If we can think about it through the lens of a school leaver who decides they want to do a carpentry apprenticeship—happy if we talk about a plumber or electrician—and they get an apprenticeship, they turn up and enrol in TAFE and they're told that, at their TAFE, first-year carpentry is full. What happens to that student then?

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**CHLOE READ:** As we said earlier, and Mr Hawkins might want to add to this, that student we would then work with to understand where we might have an opportunity for them to commence learning, either at another campus or they could start some of the units in their course but maybe not the whole thing. Mr Hawkins, do you want to talk a bit about how we approach this process?

**MARK HAWKINS:** Thanks, Ms Carter. I'll try to answer your question. If I can give some context first, which may help—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sure. Can I just ask, when you say "some of the units", how many units in each year of a certificate course for a trade?

**MARK HAWKINS:** That will depend on the particular qualification.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Carpentry?

**MARK HAWKINS:** Carpentry might have six to eight in one semester, followed by another six, depending on what year it is. So, if it's stage 1—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** So, first year, I'm a school leaver, I've turned up, what are the sort of—why would some units be available but some other units may not be available?

**MARK HAWKINS:** Can I go to the original question, to give you context?

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sure.

**MARK HAWKINS:** To your point, a school leaver acquires an apprenticeship—we'll just call it carpentry, plumbing, whatever you like. From an industry perspective, what's good to understand is that cyclically there are two really key demand times for us: One is at the start of the year and one is the middle of the year. There are reasons for that in regards to industry culture. I know people have heard of the rush to finish at Christmas time with building works, so a lot of employers don't think about, "I need an apprentice for the new year." So, historically, we've always seen large demand at the start of the year and a smaller but still considerable demand in the middle of the year.

They get an apprenticeship. TAFE, we're obligated to train that apprentice, if chosen—other RTOs can do so as well. That apprentice would come via what were called apprentice support networks, which are now ACAPs, Apprentice Connect Australia Providers. I'm sure my colleagues can help me out with that. They help facilitate the signing up of the apprentice. It's a three-way contract: employer, the training provider and apprentice. That flows through to—we have a dedicated apprentice and traineeship team, which helps facilitate—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sorry, if I can just stop you, just so I'm understanding it on the way through—so a three-way contract. Is TAFE a signatory to that contract or is it the ACAP who's the signatory to the contract?

**MARK HAWKINS:** No, TAFE is. It's called a training plan agreement.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What are the obligations that TAFE accepts on signing that three-way contract?

**MARK HAWKINS:** I'm happy to defer to my colleagues in Training Services. But what I would say is our obligation under that contract is to deliver the certified training, the qualification that aligns to that particular trade.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Within any particular time frame?

**MARK HAWKINS:** Some trades have different time frames. Some trades would have a requirement for a certain amount of worksite experience or tenure. Obviously there are differences in that, depending on what trade.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** So if it's, for example, a four-year construction trade, the understanding in the contract would be that the education provider fulfils it within that four-year time frame?

**MARK HAWKINS:** Yes. So there is a tenure, and there are exceptions to that, whether someone needs to extend because of personal reasons or they lose employment. So that's reasonable, yes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Does TAFE have the option to extend?

**MARK HAWKINS:** TAFE would only extend based on a need where that apprentice has been impacted from a personal or an employment—

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**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** No, sorry, what I meant was, if the apprentice can say "personal circumstances—I need to take six months off", that's fine. The employer is no longer able to continue the apprenticeship, so a new employer has to be found. Everything's paused. Does TAFE also have an option to say, "We can't run this course this semester. We're pausing it for a semester"?

**MARK HAWKINS:** When you say "can't run this course", are you talking about the actual apprentice not being able to participate in that course?

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I'm talking about the situation where the apprentice turns up and there are 20 places in a particular course or module and you go, "Oh, sorry, you're number 21, but come back next semester."

**MARK HAWKINS:** To get to what I think you're asking—and I'm happy to correct if it's not what you're looking for—as a result of that process, the apprenticeship and traineeship team, we have those apprentices coming through that are signed up—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sorry, under the contract, does TAFE have the option to pause it?

**MARK HAWKINS:** No.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Great, thank you.

**MARK HAWKINS:** That's all right. Then what happens is we allocate those apprentices from our contact and partnerships with these ACAPS. That gives us a pipeline of apprentices, as such, in different qualifications. That then starts to fill our demand, to use that word, at particular locations across the State. We don't have waitlists, so what we work on is, for example—it's like before, someone mentioned additional. It's not like additional. Once a class fills, if we have available resources, that being teaching facilities et cetera, we'll put on additional classes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What happens if you don't have available resources?

**MARK HAWKINS:** If we get to a position where at the preferred location we can't facilitate that at that point of time, then we would look at other locations and go back to that period of—either that's the start of the year, the middle of the year, and we're actually exploring ways now of how we can start intakes at the start of term.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Do you operate on a term model, a semester model or a continuous enrolment model?

**CHLOE READ:** It depends on—I might help you.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** A trade?

**CHLOE READ:** It depends on the course.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** A construction trade?

**CHLOE READ:** Largely, it's semester one, semester two, and we get an intake on each. The intake at the beginning of semester one is the biggest.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** So you'd expect the course to start semester one, February, semester two, July, for example?

**CHLOE READ:** August, yes. But we do have some courses that will start in a term, like, term 2 or term 4, and we are looking—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Are they construction trades?

**MARK HAWKINS:** They can be, if we have the resources and the demand. That's what we're trying to look at now is—

**CHLOE READ:** The degree to which we could do that.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Am I understanding that, if we're talking that a semester is two terms—

**CHLOE READ:** Yes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** —and if somebody was not able to be accommodated at the start of semester one, it may be that instead of having to wait a whole semester, they could start halfway through, at term 2, for example?

**MARK HAWKINS:** Yes, that's the idea and obviously we take into consideration—

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**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** And what impact does that have on their ability to fulfil their apprenticeship within the designated time frame? It pushes them back by a term, doesn't it?

**MARK HAWKINS:** It could push them back by a term, to answer your question, yes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** If it can't be done for a semester, it could push them back by a semester? Is that right?

**MARK HAWKINS:** It could, but finalisation of an apprenticeship also requires a period of time or tenure. That's what people commonly refer to as a fourth year, in which they are not attending TAFE; they are actually acquiring time in industry in their fourth year.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But there would be some students under this model that would be spending some of their fourth year at TAFE, wouldn't they? Because they haven't been able to do the allocated TAFE in the first three years.

**MARK HAWKINS:** Yes, and that could potentially—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** And that will impact on what they can learn in the workplace. Also, if you think about the way apprenticeship wages are structured, at the time when they're most valuable to the employer, they're still having to be released for TAFE time, aren't they?

**MARK HAWKINS:** Potentially yes, because there are other reasons why. For example, if an apprentice is deemed not competent in a unit, that will also mean that they'll have to come back and that would impact their fourth year as well.

**CHLOE READ:** They also might secure the apprenticeship not just ahead of February and not just ahead of August.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I accept that, but with your standard school leaver—I leave school, I get my apprenticeship, I'm going to schoolies, I'm having my holiday, I'm starting the next school year. That's the model I'm thinking about.

**MARK HAWKINS:** If I can add, it's important to note as well that via the school system, through TVET that school leaver may come to that apprenticeship with prior learning. There can be credit transfer that takes place. So, for example, if it's—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What's the maximum credit that could be transferred?

**MARK HAWKINS:** I'd have to take that on notice. That would be course dependent.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** If you could take it on notice with respect to the major construction trades.

**MARK HAWKINS:** The three major—electro, carpentry and plumbing?

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** That would be great.

**MARK HAWKINS:** Why that's important is because if they are a first year and they've got those units of competency already from their TVET experience, they could easily slot into a class at any time in that year so there's minimal impact. Obviously, we do see attrition. An apprentice for a whole range of reasons may think that's what they want to do—the challenge is an employer. For example, at week five at the start of the year, we may lose apprentices. So there are available spots there that we absolutely want to fill because we want to have every spot filled in our classes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But if we're putting somebody in at week five and everybody else has already had four weeks of learning, how is that apprentice impacted at week five?

**CHLOE READ:** We're referring to where they've done TVET courses, where they would have done potentially some of the units of the apprenticeship already.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But if they've already done the courses and they're competent, why are they going back to redo them again? It just makes no sense, does it?

**MARK HAWKINS:** What I'm saying is the course delivery might say that they have to start with unit X at the start of the trade course, which is generally work health and safety units. They may have already acquired that through their TVET qualification. So they would slot into that class. They don't have to do it again because of where they are in that stage of delivery.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But as I understood what you were just saying before, they wouldn't have to do it again anyway because the whole point of the TVET is that you basically get a bit of a turbocharge for



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your apprenticeship. The idea that we would be putting a school leaver who has that unit already back into that class, that just seems wasteful all around, doesn't it?

**MARK HAWKINS:** It's the point of time they enter that class and when those units are being delivered.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Have you got any data that shows how many students are picked up in week five because they've done the qualifications for the first four weeks in the TVET?

**MARK HAWKINS:** I'm not sure.

**CHLOE READ:** We can have a look and take it on notice.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** It just sounds very niche. We're talking about your average school leaver. What I'm really getting to is what is the impact on apprentices, on completions and on employers too. If you think about apprenticeship wages, they go up per year, the expectation being "This year I have these skills that are greater than last year." Then the fourth year is the "Yes, you're really learning on the job but you're also valuable to your employer." If that's being impacted because courses can't be offered at certain times—I'm just really trying to understand this.

Talking about attrition rates, do you have any data or have you looked at students—in my head, I think about it as accelerated entry. If you've done a course at school in a more supportive environment and then you're going—and forgive me if I haven't got it exactly right, but you're going into the second year of an apprenticeship course at TAFE. You know that first year of leaving school and going into any form of higher education, it's a big step. If you're stepping into year two, I'm wondering if you've done any work on what the impact is on that student cohort and if there's an attrition rate because the leap is a bit too big for them.

**MARK HAWKINS:** Not that I know of.

**CHLOE READ:** No. Let us take that away though. We've been doing various bits of data work recently and we'll have a look and see if there's anything on that.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I think that would be interesting, especially in terms of completion.

**CHLOE READ:** I would say, though, they may have done the school VET delivery with us already. Because we share a lot of student cohorts with the school system, our teachers are experienced in dealing with those kids who are still kids, who are on that cusp between school-aged and adult learning. They're good at putting in the right support and the wraparound support to make sure there isn't that—I think you were talking about a culture shock almost of "Here I am in an adult workplace learning environment and it feels weird."

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I think it would be peer group shock. I'm sure that the teachers are aware, but it's who you're sitting in the classroom with, too. You're asking them to grow a lot.

**CHLOE READ:** They may also be the same age because someone might have gone to year 12 with Mr Dizdar but the other people in the class who, despite being second years, started at 17.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Age isn't always a guarantee of life experience.

**CHLOE READ:** I understand. I have teenagers.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** We've got our school leaver starting at a traditional time. If they have the carpentry apprenticeship and there isn't a place in the TAFE geographically of their choice, do you have any data on how often the neighbouring TAFE actually does have a place?

**CHLOE READ:** We might go and talk to the apprenticeship team and see what they have. Because we seek to place every person, we aren't necessarily holding lists of who didn't get where they wanted to be because we want to get them to somewhere good.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Who's the person who is responsible for the alternative placements? Who's the TAFE employee who does that?

**CHLOE READ:** Is that our apprenticeships team? We will go to them and see if they've got any information on where did they not fill—for want of a better term—the primary request and get us to somewhere else more positive.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** The thing I really didn't understand this morning—and I know, Mr Dizdar, you were trying to be helpful. If I want to be a carpenter, I don't want to be a cabinet-maker, I don't want to be a joiner. I want to be a carpenter. If the experience of somebody turning up saying, "I want to be a carpenter," is "Well, we can't take you for carpentry yet but you can do these cabinet-making classes"—it feels a little bit to me like turning up at university and saying, "You can't be a lawyer but, hey, accountancy—off you go!" Are we really

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accommodating the career ambitions of these students who are turning up if we're diverting them to something "a bit like"?

**CHLOE READ:** I think there's a few things in that. There are places in the VET system where the "a bit like" is "very like". We're not really talking so much in the trades, although Mr Hawkins might want to comment on trades. But if you think about a traineeship, say in the IT and business administration area—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I'm really focusing on the construction trades. That's what I'm really focusing on.

**CHLOE READ:** But there are places where they're together. The other thing I would say is—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Can we just pull that apart? In the construction trades, are there courses that are "a bit like" or do you have to do X, Y and Z to become a carpenter?

**MARK HAWKINS:** You have to do X, Y and Z to become a carpenter. You have to do X, Y and Z to be an electrician. There are common core units of competence across those.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Work health and safety and things like that? Do you do professional negligence units in trades?

**CHLOE READ:** We do an ethics—and what's it called?

**MARK HAWKINS:** They do small business type of units.

**CHLOE READ:** There is acting ethically or something like that.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** So in a trade, when your TAFE of choice can't accommodate you because there isn't the capacity, the apprenticeship team in that TAFE would seek to place you in a reasonably geographically accessible TAFE. If that's not possible, you wait until a vacancy opens up. Is that right?

**MARK HAWKINS:** We will then look to either move resources around, so bring a teacher in to put an additional class on, if we had—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** With resources—and I'm thinking hairdressing, though I know carpentry is very different to hairdressing. You don't have a basin, you don't have a dummy and you don't have the—what did we decide this morning?—soft facilities for hairdressing.

**CHLOE READ:** Consumables, I think.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Don't you need—I don't know; I'm not a carpenter—workbenches and things like that, as well as a teacher?

**CHLOE READ:** Wood.

**MARK HAWKINS:** Yes. To answer your question—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** So aren't there physical constraints, as well as the number of teachers?

**MARK HAWKINS:** Yes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Therefore, it can't always be possible to put an extra class on. In how many TAFEs would you have the capacity to put an extra construction trade class on?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Some of it would also go to timetabling.

**CHLOE READ:** Yes, that's right.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sorry, what do you mean by timetabling?

**CHLOE READ:** The access to the facility.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** The expert facility, you might be able to timetable into different slots and sessions.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** So have, like, a morning session and an afternoon session.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Possibly.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Do you ever run Saturday classes?

**MARK HAWKINS:** We have in the past, yes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** It's a solution, isn't it?

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**CORRECTED**

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**MARK HAWKINS:** There was some resistance from industry around that, to be frank.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** And probably students too, and probably teachers too.

**MARK HAWKINS:** Yes, but we have done it and we've done it successfully. To Mr Dizdar's comment, it's looking at nights and it's looking at morning and afternoon use of the workshops, so the teaching teams will structure their programming around what tasks happen where.

**CHLOE READ:** The other piece would be block, so block release, where students come and do multiple days at a time rather than doing a day a week.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Which is primarily for regional students, isn't it?

**CHLOE READ:** No, there are some places in metro that will do it, largely because of local preferences.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** How many students are in a holding pattern waiting for a position to open up? Do you have data on that? You must have, because the apprenticeship team deals with these people.

**CHLOE READ:** I don't think so, because I think what they would do is be placing them in an enrolment either somewhere else, or here but not yet starting, or here but starting next semester.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** When you say "here but not yet starting", that means that they're in a holding pattern, doesn't it? Because they're not studying at that time. Can I have the data of anybody who's in the "here but not yet starting" category?

**CHLOE READ:** I think what we would do is enrol them for the next available slot. We may not be able to tell whether they are someone who just wants to enrol for semester two or someone who—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sorry, if they're enrolled but not yet starting and they're waiting for next semester, that means the course isn't available to them in the semester, doesn't it? That's exactly what that means.

**CHLOE READ:** Unless they wanted to enrol for semester two, when that's open.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** That means there are students who are turned away because the capacity doesn't exist in that semester. That's exactly what that means.

**The CHAIR:** The number of early childhood students that have enrolled this year—do you have that data?

**CHLOE READ:** I won't have that for this year.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have it for last year?

**CHLOE READ:** Maybe.

**The CHAIR:** Obviously we need to get more early childhood educators in, and I'm just wondering what the trend looks like.

**CHLOE READ:** Let me see what I can find. Are you interested in all levels of early childhood? I assume you are.

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**CHLOE READ:** I'm pretty sure I have something on this. I might take it on notice. If I find it, I'll come back to you. I've seen numbers somewhere.

**The CHAIR:** The Public Service Commission require all agencies to develop a sexual harassment and assault policy—

**CHLOE READ:** Sorry, I've just found it. This is for 2024. I don't have the trend with me, but I do have 2024. We had 10,450 certificate III, 2,470 diploma and 560 Bachelor of Early Childhood Education and Care. Then we also have a bunch of smaller qualifications—statements of attainment in topics like identify and report children and young people at risk, for example. I don't have numbers for those enrolments.

**The CHAIR:** Is it possible to come back on notice with the 2023 and 2022 figures, just out of interest, for what you've given me?

**CHLOE READ:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** The sexual harassment and assault policy that all agencies were required to develop—how are you monitoring implementation of that?

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**CORRECTED**

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**CHLOE READ:** I might ask Ms Tickle to talk to that one. I know that we implemented in March of 2024. We've conducted an audit, I think, to do some review to make sure that we've got a handle on the processes. Do you want to jump in?

**JULIE TICKLE:** Yes. We were in train with our policy when the Public Service Commissioner released her model policy. Our policy does meet the minimum standards, but we were audited by Ernst and Young as well, just to make sure that we weren't missing anything. They did make some—

**CHLOE READ:** That's an internal audit piece—

**JULIE TICKLE:** We did that ourselves.

**CHLOE READ:** —that we use for continuous improvement, not external.

**JULIE TICKLE:** Not someone told us to.

**CHLOE READ:** Yes.

**JULIE TICKLE:** They did give us some additional recommendations, which we've put into place. One thing that we've put into place is we've got a working group that is considering all aspects of the policy implementation and providing information to the executive leadership team on how that policy is being implemented. This is one of our mandatory training modules. We have a suite of, I think, eight mandatory training modules which all employees must complete by 31 May. Last year 93 per cent of all employees had completed it by the due date. That also includes some employees that are on long-term leave, so it's very high, our completion of all of our modules, but including our SASH module and mandatory training.

**The CHAIR:** I believe one of the objects of the policy is to make sure that supports are genuinely trauma informed. How do you intend to make that a reality?

**JULIE TICKLE:** Part of what we did with our policy was make sure information was available to all of our employees, so there's a dedicated page on the staff intranet talking about the policy and the implementation of the policy. That has a strong focus on the trauma-informed practice and reflects the Human Rights Commission's recommendation for positive duty. We also run trauma-informed sessions for our employees. We run things like youth mental health first-aid sessions and accidental counsellor training as well, to try and equip our teachers and our support employees with tools to support employees and students on campus. There's a range of things that we're doing to make sure that the policy is implemented to its intent.

**CHLOE READ:** I think they're both available broadly, but we also issue targeted invitations to employees who we think work in roles where this is a more likely scenario—the accidental counselling piece—that they're in a role where the potential for a disclosure might be higher. We continue to do that and to encourage people to engage in those professional development opportunities.

**The CHAIR:** I asked last time about the number of counsellors for victim-survivors on TAFE campuses, and I was given a figure back then. I feel like it was around 50 for 154 campuses maybe—I can't remember. I just want to know what that number looks like now. In comparison to last year, is it more or less?

**CHLOE READ:** I don't know if we have dedicated counsellors for—

**JULIE TICKLE:** We have counsellors. We don't have dedicated counsellors for certain—we have a number of counsellors, but I actually don't have the number of them. We can easily provide that on notice, though.

**The CHAIR:** That would be very useful. On the ECEC numbers that you gave me before about students completing the various courses, were those commencements or active?

**CHLOE READ:** I've got to find it again now. It would be commencements, because they were degree qualifications. There were courses in there that are longer than a year, so it'll be the number of people who enrolled.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have the completions data for those courses?

**CHLOE READ:** I wouldn't, no, because some of those courses they'll still be doing the course.

**The CHAIR:** But generally, in relation to ECEC.

**CHLOE READ:** I don't have it with me, but I can take it on notice for particular years, noting that it'll be completions from some number of years ago. With that, there's always a bit of leeway. I think Mr Kurucz was talking about this earlier—that because students could do it part time or they could defer their course, if it's a trade apprenticeship, it's five to six years before we consider someone as completed or not completed. We can come back on that.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The CHAIR:** To the extent that it's helpful in working out what information to give me, my focus here is on trying to look at the potential workforce shortages that we may have in the future. I'm just trying to get to grips with how many people are still going into early childhood and wanting to do that, whether recent changes have made a difference and that sort of thing. Any data you can give me around the numbers of enrolments and completions over at least a three-year period would be very useful, just to see that trend.

**CHLOE READ:** It sounds like we might just give you the actual numbers—this many people completed, this many people completed—noting that they don't necessarily bear a relation to the commencement number for that year.

**The CHAIR:** That would be great.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If I could look at issues relating to social media campaigns, Mr Dizdar, I'm just checking how much the New South Wales Government spent on influencer-based campaigns, including TikTok partnerships, to promote trades and TAFE.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'm not aware of any expenditure on TikTok.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of other social media platforms?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I'm happy to take it on notice and find out. If you're going to do any advertising, there's a whole-of-government process. You have to put them annually up for consideration of government through the Department of Customer Service, which manages that. You have to indicate what the intended nature is. It's almost like a business case for each, and also what the expenditure is, its purpose and its intent. As it relates to TikTok, I'm not across anything.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** That's fine. As to the social media campaigns, are there any measurable outcomes if agreement has been met and expenses have been made?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** That's part of the case that you put forward for consideration. You don't take any of these pieces lightly, because you want to get to an audience. It could be that you're seeking enrolments or visibility of offerings et cetera. My colleagues might have further details.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** I don't have any specific details, but I can tell you one initiative we have is vocational education and training ambassadors. They are people who are former training awards winners, generally, who have been great in their fields. They might be apprentice or trainee of the year. We encourage them to go to events. I'd have to take on notice as to whether we pay them for that role. That may be also where you see us out and about pushing the message to go and study vocational education and training. We generally do it through people who have won training awards previously in New South Wales.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Further to that, in light of the Minister's comments this morning—when he was talking about demand being low or hoping it would be higher in terms of the trade apprenticeships—would social media or a campaign like this or the ambassadors be part of that response?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** We try to use a multiplicity of avenues. The Minister this morning was talking about the very successful Educational Pathways Program. That was only in 20 schools. It's now in 183 schools. That's certainly growing, and we're seeing on the data a 30 per cent increase in school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. That's definitely having an impact. That's not a case of advertising; that's a case of working closely with high schools, with support structures and with our TAFE colleagues on opportunities. We exhaust what that can look like. The Minister was talking about the Government's commitment that we're charged with delivering on the 1,000 apprenticeships and traineeships across government. We're well on track to deliver that. We spoke about the 91.5 per cent retention rate with that program. There's a variety of avenues. There are other things I can unpack for you with my colleagues, Ms Merton, like the Bert Evans scholarship and how we target different groups so that we can get even higher uptake.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Mr Dizdar, you spoke earlier about the high retention rates relevant to the 1,000 apprenticeships initiative. My colleague was asking for data as to completion rates. It was completion rates relating to other materials which were going to be explored for this afternoon. Have we got those?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes, we do. Mr Kurucz can help you with that.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** I've got some further information. I might pass to my colleague Ms Lawrence, who could probably give you information about the 1,000 apprenticeships and traineeships in particular. Then we can come back to general completion rates.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** On that 1,000, we've established retention rates are pleasing. But at this point, what do we know on the completion?

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**CORRECTED**

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**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** In terms of completion rates for that program, as the Minister mentioned this morning, we've had around 900 commencements. The program has been running only for two full financial years. It's in its third year at the moment. We've had 119 completions to date, largely in traineeships, given the short duration.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** So it was 900 have commenced.

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** That's right.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** At this point, two years into the program, how many have reached the two-year completion?

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** It's 119 completions.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Of 900?

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** That's right.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Which is 20 per cent.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** That will be because many of them will be in a course that will take longer than two years to formally complete. If you're doing electrotech, that might be four years or more, based on your pattern of study, whereas the ones that Ms Lawrence has talked about are traineeships, which you can generally complete within a year or two. We're seeing 91.5 per cent of people who are still in the program, which should, ultimately, lead to a completion rate of that same level. They're just not yet ready to complete, which is why it's in the lower 100 numbers.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I know I'm stating the obvious, but it's with side-by-side government employment. These are apprentices and trainees employed across government.

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** And almost half of those 900 are apprentices, so they will have a longer time.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What's the balance in those numbers between traineeships and apprentices?

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** At the moment, based on the current number of commencements, it's 41 per cent apprentices and 59 per cent trainees.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What are the fields that the traineeships are in?

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** All sorts of fields.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** On notice, can you give us a list of those fields?

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** IT and digital, program management—there's a huge range. I'd be happy to give you a full list.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If I could ask about the fee-free training that we speak of—and I appreciate you've collected the data on that—do we have any data in terms of completion of the fee-free training?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Mr Kurucz, were we able to obtain that?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** In relation to fee free in particular, one of the major fee-free programs, which we spoke about earlier, is apprenticeships and traineeships. Ms Lawrence has some information on completion rates specifically for apprenticeships and traineeships.

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** Was there a particular time period that we're looking for?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Most current.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** The last two years maybe.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The last three years, if available.

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** I believe Mr Kurucz provided an overarching completion figure for apprenticeships commenced in 2020 earlier this morning, which I have as 50.3 per cent. That was up 1.9 per cent when compared with the cohort that commenced in 2019. It was 3.4 per cent above the national average. We also look year on year at completions as well, because that time lag does mean that you're waiting a while for data for a full cohort to complete. We had 31,120 apprentices and trainees complete their training in the 12 months to June last year.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** To make this a bit easier to follow your data, just to establish here that completion for 2020 was 50.3 per cent?

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**CORRECTED**

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**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** For apprentices, that's right.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If your data follows this, what do we know in terms of years following? For 2021, how was that?

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** I'll have to get you that year-on-year breakdown on notice.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** We're talking six years ago, that's all.

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** I just don't have that data in front of me at the moment.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** So for the last five years, we don't have completion rates for apprenticeships?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** It's the way that the calculation works. You have to look at the last possible time that someone could've commenced their course. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research generally looks at a period of four to five years. For instance, we have a really good and confident idea that the people that commenced in 2020 now would have contemplated all the possible life circumstances that would've led to them completing or not completing. It's around the five-year mark that nationally, from a data perspective, we say we can have confidence in the completion rate.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The average length of an apprenticeship is three to five years.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** Yes, three to five years. But you can also put it on pause or delay it for particular personal or family reasons.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I'm just thinking here, if the last completion rate data we have is 2020—it it now being 2026—and the average length of an apprenticeship is three to five years, there seems to be a bit of a missing piece here.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** The data that Ms Lawrence was referencing was actually data that was released towards the end of last year, I believe.

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** That's right. It's the most recent publicly available data.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** That's relevant to the 1,000 apprenticeships.

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** No, that's for the whole system.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I think you'll find they're 2020 commencements. The data my colleagues are reading to you are those students that commenced in 2020, and because—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The issue is the completion, Mr Dizdar. That's all.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Yes. The completion data they're giving—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Let's just be simple on this. The last I've got now—the completion rate for 2020 is 50.3 per cent. Anything more current—the last five years?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** That's the 2020 commencing cohort.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** If a student was commencing at TAFE or an independent provider in their apprenticeship in 2026, we'd be looking at the data in 2030 or 2031—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Sure, I can appreciate that.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** —to understand whether or not that person successfully completed.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of the 2021 cohort, when would we expect some completion data on that?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** End of 2026.

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** But, Ms Merton, the data that I offered to provide you on notice—we do also have completions per year; it's just not that it's in relation to when those particular learners started their apprenticeship.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Commenced.

**AMANDA LAWRENCE:** That's right.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** We look forward to that. Thank you very much. There was also a comment from the Minister this morning looking at the completion rates of the registered training organisations,

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**CORRECTED**

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the group training organisations or the industry bodies that provide the training. What do we know about those completion rates?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Do we have that data?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** No, I wasn't able to get that specific information for this afternoon. We were happy to take it on notice this morning. I can give you the general completion rates overall in our Smart and Skilled program. For the 2025 calendar year for all providers—that's TAFE and independent providers—that completion rate was 53 per cent, which was a 3 per cent increase on 2024.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Sorry, that's Smart and Skilled, which captures both the TAFE students, the RTOs and the—

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** Correct. TAFE came out of the Smart and Skilled contestable market on 1 January 2026, so it includes TAFE.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In the last estimates, from memory—I could check the transcript—I think I raised the issue of the RTOs. The industry groups were reporting completion rates of 60 to 70 per cent, if not higher. I'm just wondering if there have been any more learnings as to a higher completion rate compared to the TAFE completion rate.

**CHLOE READ:** Because I'm TAFE, I might comment on that, but—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** We recognise the different student cohort in the intake.

**CHLOE READ:** There is that, but there's also—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I appreciate that but, further to that, what else are we learning here?

**CHLOE READ:** We're doing a fair bit of work to understand and unpack completions because the other thing that we do, which almost nobody else does, is everything from certificate I to diploma, advanced diploma and higher education, everywhere in the State, for just about any industry you can think of. For example, we were talking before about the 2020 cohort completion rate for plumbing certificate III, and plumbing for the 2020 cohort is 70.2 per cent. A completion rate for certificate III in carpentry for the 2020 cohort is 74.8 per cent.

But when you take everything that we do—certificate I, certificate II, all the different courses and all the different things—and you put that cohort lens on it, a single number becomes almost meaningless in that kind of context. We'll be doing lots of work, I think, on how do we really understand and unpack completions? The other thing that doesn't happen at the moment, which does, say, at a university, is if I come and say, "I really want to do a particular thing, a particular course," and then I decide to change to something else, that is a non-completion and a new enrolment. Whereas, if I start a degree and I move to a different degree, that is still a single enrolment.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** You transfer or something, yes.

**CHLOE READ:** There's some stuff that we really want to do to unpack those completion rates but also what is it that drives things like that? We talked before about student satisfaction. A really high student satisfaction for people who don't complete a course—that's not just work for me; I think that's across the VET sector. Really understanding what that means, in terms of where we should be offering a different pattern of study, I think, is really important.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Ms Read, in terms of whether it's an exit interview or getting an understanding of what may have led an apprentice to discontinue, are we capturing that?

**CHLOE READ:** Yes. Mr Kurucz might want to cover this because it's national data across the whole system, but there are surveys conducted for students as they exit any of the pieces of the VET system. That's where those pieces of information, like did I get a job improvement or did I get what I wanted from the training, come from. They tell us a whole range of things about why. For example, apprentices, I think, from memory—somebody might correct me. The highest reason to discontinue an apprenticeship is the employer condition, for want of a better term. That may also include pay. There's some family circumstances stuff and then, of course, there's some who say, "I didn't because the training wasn't what I expected." We look across all of those factors, and where we've got the training piece, we obviously seek to improve that and understand what's driving that.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** I found it really interesting, Ms Merton, with the NCVER data, because you might just presume people undertake the training to get a job. You'd think that would be really high. It is the main reason, but I did find it interesting to read the latest report when there are people who nominate that they're undertaking training to increase my self-esteem, for recreational reasons, to get skills for volunteer work, or to improve my general education skills. The NCVER data, which is national, gives you a really good, strong breakdown of why



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**CORRECTED**

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young people and career changers undertake vocational education and training. Obviously, to get a job stands out as the main factor, but we sometimes underestimate those other factors of why people join.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Mr Dizdar, those people who are doing it for personal development or personal satisfaction, are they on fee-free places?

**MURAT DIZDAR:** All of the apprentices and trainees are fee-free.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** The ones you were just talking about, Mr Dizdar.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** What are the details on those ones?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** For the fee-free program, which we talked about, that was funded by the Commonwealth Government before. They're full qualifications. They're focused only on the critical skills areas. We don't ask at the time of enrolment, explicitly, what the reason for undertaking that training is so, of course, they'd be doing that. We don't generally subsidise existing worker training, though. So if someone's coming through a formal training program, that's generally not funded through government—through Smart and Skilled. But, if an individual has come forward, they want to train, and it's in an eligible course area, if that's eligible, then it will be a fee-free subsidised qualification.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** So somebody who's doing, for example, one of those short courses on AI for their personal interest could be in a fee-free place.

**CHLOE READ:** No. The fee-free places are entirely nationally recognised qualifications. The micro-credentials and microskills that are offered through the Institute of Applied Technology Digital are non-nationally recognised courses that have been developed by TAFE, and they are not entirely free. They are subsidised, but they're not entirely free. They were funded by the former Government four years ago and there was a sliding scale of subsidy for those courses. So there is a fee to pay for some of them, and some of them are free.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** The construction micro-credential courses?

**CHLOE READ:** I'd need to take that on notice.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** If you could, thank you.

**CHLOE READ:** I think it's the same model, but I could let you know which ones are free. I think the very short ones are largely free, and then the slightly longer ones might have a sliding scale of subsidies.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Two things—which courses are entirely free? And if there's any data that correlates the personal development or personal interest—which is possibly higher in a short course than in a full trade qualification—with subsidies, the level of subsidy that applies.

**CHLOE READ:** I don't know if the NCVER data is broken down. Mr Dizdar is reading from the—

**MURAT DIZDAR:** The actual report.

**CHLOE READ:** —exit survey of the nationally recognised qualifications. I don't know if the "Was I doing this for personal interest?" is correlated in that report with what the qual they were doing is, but we can find that out.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I'm a big believer in everybody getting as much education as they possibly can, but also looking to make sure that we subsidise that which is most needed.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Ms Read, at an earlier estimates we also spoke about the full utilisation of TAFE facilities, resources, infrastructure and possibly working with the relevant industry or an RTO or something. I'm just wondering if there's been any update on that?

**CHLOE READ:** Yes, a bit. We talked about some examples of those, and I think we may have given you some examples on notice of where we were partnering with particular organisations for them to use our premises for training delivery. We also talked a bit about community partnerships and local use of TAFE campuses. We've got a new leasing policy that allows us, for a period of up to 12 months, to enter into arrangements with a specific set of organisations, largely not-for-profit, community, locally based organisations for less than a market rate of rent, because there's a Government policy that says that facilities need to be at least at market rates unless there's an exemption. What that does is let us engage with those local organisations who need a space for whatever it is that they want to use their TAFE for, and we really welcome that as part of making sure our campuses are interesting places to be, vibrant, there are people around, and they're as well used as possible as public assets.

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**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Ms Read, from memory, at the last estimates we were speaking about Gosford TAFE.

**CHLOE READ:** Yes.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I'm just wondering if there might be an update relating to Gosford TAFE?

**CHLOE READ:** Yes, there is. We talked last time that TAFE had been interested in buying the local council premises in Gosford, and that that was not going ahead. Since then, what we've been doing is looking at the three Central Coast TAFE premises and doing a bit of planning work around them. What we've got is a kind of plan for the Central Coast with some investment in that plan of around \$38 million over either three or four years. What that will do is essentially upgrade facilities and group like things together. For example, we currently have some machining and fitting work and delivery that happens at Gosford; that'll be moving to Wyong to be with the other trades that are at Wyong.

Similarly, what we really want to do is have Gosford as a kind of health hub, so we're going to be moving nursing to Gosford, and that'll give it better access to the hospital for things like placements. Then, at Ourimbah, we're going to move hair and beauty to there. Their facilities are in need of an upgrade, and so being able to move those to Ourimbah where they'll be alongside things like fitness courses and massage and other things offered there—we'll have those three different hubs for the Central Coast region with specialisations in what they deliver alongside this really good upgrade in the facilities as we kind of shuffle things around and do some works at each of those campuses.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** In terms of the facility that was identified, which I think was a council facility, and there were some discussions and something about it only being available for a limited period or something—that never came together?

**CHLOE READ:** No, we talked about that last time. The council had been waiting to understand whether there was going to be funding allocated in the budget to purchase those premises, and we confirmed last time, I think, that that wasn't the case, and the council has moved on. They're selling that property to someone else.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Was TAFE ever part of that discussion, to acquire that property?

**CHLOE READ:** We were discussing it with council, that we needed to understand the funding, and then we've gone to this alternate plan that gives us investment across the three campuses on the Central Coast—I think, probably in many ways, a better outcome because of that investment at Ourimbah and Wyong.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I'm conscious in terms of the distance here, in terms of Gosford to Wyong and the other locations—we're confident students can meet that?

**CHLOE READ:** I think so. They're on the train line, so largely speaking I think that would be okay. There's also certainly parking at Wyong and Ourimbah, so yes, I believe so. Of course, knowing the plan and communicating the plan ahead of time allows students to make those choices about what is being offered at the campus that I can most easily get to, and am I interested in that provision, do I need to consider one of the other Central Coast campuses?

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Thank you very much. In terms of the TAFE teacher workforce capacity, I'm just wondering what the current teacher vacancy rate might be by discipline and region?

**JULIE TICKLE:** It's not the same way that you might consider the department's vacancy rate. It's a really different model in terms of how we allocate teachers to classes. We've absolutely had some areas that we needed to add more teachers. The Paid to Learn program that we just have been talking about just started its latest cohort last week, actually, with 34 new teachers coming to a range of areas. Sometimes we struggle to get, like the Minister's example, a teacher in Dubbo, so all of our teacher vacancies are advertised on I Work for NSW, and our internal intranet, where vacancies occur. But even though we have moved to an 87 per cent stable, permanent workforce, we still have and will always have casual teachers at TAFE, so it's very flexible. We can flex up or down based on the requirements. It's a little bit hard to give you a vacancy rate—we don't monitor it in that way.

**CHLOE READ:** Those casual teachers—we talked before about people choosing to remain casual. Often, that's because they might also have a job or a business, and so they're working in industry and they want to teach at TAFE to give back to the industry they work in. That's incredibly valuable for us, so we don't want to lose that by—

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Sure, I recognise that the flexibility absolutely works for them.

**CHLOE READ:** One hundred per cent.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Also recognising the skills that they're bringing to the job by remaining in the industry.

**MURAT DIZDAR:** Very good currency, that.

**CHLOE READ:** It's fantastic, yes.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I'm just wondering, have we had instances—in reference to Dubbo, and I appreciate that's just a one-off vacancy—in terms of cancellation of courses, that we can't fill the teaching positions?

**CHLOE READ:** As Ms Tickle mentioned, we tend to start with the premise that we will offer courses that we know we can deliver, and so it's less likely that we would cancel a course because we didn't have a teacher or a facility, because we wouldn't offer a course if we didn't have the right technology. Obviously, there are still teachers who might leave unexpectedly or those kinds of things, but I think we would seek at that point to bring in a casual teacher to fill that vacancy quickly. I'm not sure I'd be able to give you a kind of direct relationship between those two things.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** I am just looking at the Smart and Skilled area, if I could. I cite this from examples that have come from the construction industry and builders, that the apprentices that they have interacted with—at times, there have been mixed views. One says, "I have to employ someone on my site to manage the apprentices". I'm just wondering what the engagement might be with the industry in terms of the teaching or the course formation?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** I'm happy to start and then I'll pass to my colleagues at TAFE to maybe talk a little bit about what they might do on the ground from a regional perspective.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** This has been raised previously. This is not new. That's all.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** Of course. From a qualification perspective, that framework is set nationally through the national training packages, and those are developed by what's called Jobs and Skills Councils. The national Jobs and Skills Council is called BuildSkills, and they are responsible for training package development for a large number of the building and construction-related qualifications. They have really close links with industry. They are basically embedded within industry, so they do a lot of those regular, ongoing conversations with industry to make sure that the product development is up to date in terms of the training package and qualifications.

I would say that they don't make constant and often changes because they're also trying to limit the impacts on training providers like TAFE, who might necessarily constantly have to update curriculum and learning materials if there are too many changes nationally. So we work within that national framework. Then we also have industry training advisory bodies, which are essentially local within New South Wales representatives for us for particular industries, including building and construction, that give us a good indication of what's happening on the ground. But we still operate within that national qualification framework. I might pass to TAFE to talk about curriculum development and any kind of local industry engagement they may do.

**CHLOE READ:** There's a range of places—the Manufacturing Centre of Excellence would be the obvious example, and the Institute of Applied Technology—where we look to partner with industry and sets of industries to do things in a way that will make the curriculum directly relevant. The other thing I'd say is the data centre academy that we have at Meadowbank is a really good example of looking to develop a set of courses that seek to very explicitly give people the right skills to work in data centres—a clearly identified need—and partnering with industry on those. Then, at a local level, there's often some contact between apprentice employers and TAFEs. I don't know if you want to comment a bit on that, Mr Hawkins.

**MARK HAWKINS:** I was just going to add, running off the back of Mr Kurucz's comments about the Jobs and Skills Councils, that in our new operating model, there are really strong synergies between our faculty structure and those skills areas and the Jobs and Skills Councils. We have appropriate representation at those forums that are offered through Jobs and Skills Councils. That can go right down to even access to teachers to get feedback around the qualifications being taught et cetera. It gives us a voice in a national setting, being the largest vocational education training provider in the Southern Hemisphere. A real positive outcome of our faculty model, the new operating model, is that synergy between those faculties and those Jobs and Skills Councils, which have been set up to each industry specifically.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Relevant to the Jobs and Skills Councils that you just made reference to, in light of this feedback coming from the construction industry and the priority and attention at the moment on that sector in housing targets and priorities, I am wondering who from that sector would be on the council or participate in these discussions?

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**CORRECTED**

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**MARK HAWKINS:** It's not who's on the councils, but who's participating in the conversations. If it's the construction industry, I'd break it down into the relevant tiers. Obviously, there'd be tier 1 construction companies who have different needs to organisations that represent the domestic residential construction industry, such as the MBA and HIA. They're all involved in these conversations, as such, in these forums.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** You've just identified two of the national industry groups in construction. In terms of New South Wales, are we having any greater engagement with the industry outside the two national peak bodies?

**MARK HAWKINS:** From a TAFE NSW perspective, yes. We have interactions with the ITABs, as Mr Kurucz says as well.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Do you want to elaborate on that?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** The ITABs will engage with anyone from small to medium businesses to larger firms as well. It just depends on the particular matter which we're engaging them about and if they've got a particular point of concern as well. BuildSkills is primarily responsible for the national engagement, so they generally tend to engage with larger employers. Whereas if we hear that there's a particular challenge with training quality or particular concerns coming from a particular industry group in a region, then we will go to the industry training advisory body within New South Wales, the ITAB, to get that more regional-specific information.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** From a New South Wales perspective, who are we consulting with?

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** I'd have to take that on notice, because we go to the ITAB and then the ITAB will go and engage with the people that they think is best, depending on the request they've got. ITABs can be made up of members that are registered training organisations and also people that work directly in the industry. So I'll take it on notice to try and get you a better sense of that.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** It would be helpful in terms of my discussions with them to say, "You have a voice. There is consultation." And then they're saying, "So who's added, where and what are they saying?" Maybe if I could get the stakeholder list, when the last discussions were held, what might be coming up and how people can be part of this.

**JEREMY KURUCZ:** Yes, sure. No problem.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** And, as you can recognise, the industry are wanting to participate in this as much as the government training organisations.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I have a couple of quick questions about workers compensation claims at TAFE. I am wondering what the trend is in terms of both physical and psychological injury.

**CHLOE READ:** Ms Tickle is straight to the note. I'll hand to Ms Tickle to answer that.

**JULIE TICKLE:** We have had an increase in both physical and psychological injuries. Our 12-month rolling count of serious claims is the same, though.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Can you explain that to me—how there's an increase but the count is the same?

**JULIE TICKLE:** Lost time injuries have increased but we also monitor the serious injury frequency rate, and that is the same. So even though it has risen, they're less serious and people are coming back to work more quickly. Does that answer the question?

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Physical and psychological, are they trending the same? Is physical higher than psychological?

**JULIE TICKLE:** Like many places, psychological notifications are rising. We have had a really big focus on the psychological safety guide. I think there are 15 or 16 hazards that are identified in there. We've done a considerable amount of work in the organisation to address those. We've launched a wellbeing plan, which actually won the 2025 Australian HR Award for Best Health and Wellbeing program.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** That's really exciting. What was the impact on the psychological health of the workers, though?

**JULIE TICKLE:** The thing about having a wellbeing plan—and I think this is a good thing—is that when you talk about psychological safety, the number of incidents that are recorded in psychological safety actually rise. That's one thing that happens quite often because we're lifting the profile. I guess my reason for explaining that was to let you know that we've put more of a focus on it and we are seeing a rise in psychological incidents.

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**CORRECTED**

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But we are happy to see them coming up because it means that people are calling them out and using our hotline more regularly.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Does that rise in psychological injury reports indicate any issues with bullying or intimidation, or any workplace culture issues that can and should be addressed?

**JULIE TICKLE:** Psychological incidents are quite broad, and certainly bullying and harassment is one category that's recorded. Like all agencies and departments in the Government, we do the PMES survey once a year. That gives us a really good indication or some levers to look at pulling and pushing in terms of where we should concentrate. I think this stuff is a concern for everyone.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Absolutely.

**JULIE TICKLE:** The answer is yes, it is a concern for us. That's why we're dedicating resources and concentrating on wellbeing, which is a really personal thing, offering things like our Wellbeing Wednesdays to people.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I guess what I was getting at was are you noticing patterns of workplace culture? Then what is the work being done to encourage a different culture? That's really what I was asking.

**JULIE TICKLE:** We do a range of things. We have toolbox talks each month, where leaders take their employees through things. We just did one recently on cultural safety. We do lots around psychological safety. There are a lot of things available for people on our intranet. We encourage early indicators and absolutely ask people to put anything up to us early so that we can look at it. Because it's different, of course, from a physical injury or a physical hazard that you can see, sometimes these things are not provided to us in a timely manner. We really encourage and work with line managers to have regular conversations and check-ins. In fact, one of our organisation-wide priorities from our PMES was to just do a simple thing: to make sure that our line managers are checking in with their employees on a regular basis in a really safe, personal, confidential space, and making sure that they are checking in with their line managers so that our employees have got somewhere to speak to people about how they're feeling and how they're going at work.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What's the average cost and time lost per claim? As well as average, maybe you can give me the top 10 percentile as well.

**JULIE TICKLE:** I might have to take that on notice. I don't have that here that I can see.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I am happy to get that on notice.

**The CHAIR:** We will take a break now. That concludes our time with the witnesses we have in front of us now. Thank you very much. We'll be back with our university witnesses at 3.45 p.m. To the extent that there were questions taken on notice—and there will be supplementary questions—the secretariat will be in touch. Thank you very much for your time.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**(Short adjournment)**

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**CORRECTED**

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**Professor MARK SCOTT**, AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Sydney, affirmed and examined

**Professor ANNAMARIE JAGOSE**, OAM, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, University of Sydney, on former affirmation

**Professor G. Q. MAX LU**, AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Wollongong, on former oath

**Professor S. BRUCE DOWTON**, Vice-Chancellor and President, Macquarie University, before the Committee via videoconference, on former affirmation

**Professor VLADO PERKOVIC**, Provost, University of New South Wales, on former oath

**Mr DAVID CROSS**, Chief of Staff, University of New South Wales, on former affirmation

**Professor KYLIE READMAN**, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education and Students, University of Technology Sydney, affirmed and examined

**Distinguished Professor GEORGE WILLIAMS**, AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, Western Sydney University, on former affirmation

**Professor GEOFF LEE**, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Western Sydney and External Engagement, Western Sydney University, affirmed and examined

**Professor TYRONE CARLIN**, Vice-Chancellor and President, Southern Cross University, on former oath

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back. Good afternoon to all of you, and thank you for appearing before the Committee today. Professors Scott, Readman and Lee, as you've not yet appeared before this Committee, you will need to be sworn. I remind all the rest of the witnesses that we didn't swear you in because you've already been sworn at a prior hearing of this inquiry. We will start with the Opposition.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Good afternoon. Lovely to see you all. If I could start with Professor Perkovic. Last estimates we talked briefly about research with Iran and everybody said no current research. The answer to the question on notice, the follow-up question, was very precise from the University of New South Wales. It said, "At the institutional level, UNSW has no active research collaborations with Iran." Is that because you knew you had individual engineering researchers who were collaborating on research with Iran?

**VLADO PERKOVIC:** No, the answer that was provided was specific and precise and accurate as we knew it. We manage that very carefully. We have been very clear with our researchers and with our academics and with all of our staff—particularly since the communication from the foreign Minister in 2023—that we do not want or accept any sort of research collaborations, or active collaborations, with Iran or Iranian institutions, and have communicated that and managed that across our organisation.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But it seems to be very clear, unless you have information to the contrary, that there was a paper published—I think it was in the Institute of Electrical Engineering journal—just a couple of months ago with a co-author from the University of New South Wales along with researchers from China and Iran. What do you say to that?

**VLADO PERKOVIC:** I'm advised that the work that led to that paper's publication was undertaken prior to the communication from the foreign Minister. That was research that had been undertaken some years previously and was published. As is often the case with academic publishing, these things can take many years to be published. It was part of a multinational consortium that was undertaking collaborative research where a UNSW researcher was involved and in that specific situation, I believe, provided editorial oversight for the publication rather than an active role in the research.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I suppose that really raises the question that I have. I acknowledge that research can precede publication by significant periods of time. For it to be before the letter from the Government, we're talking now three years of time. Editorial oversight, though, is something that would happen in the later stages of research—in fact, when you're preparing that research for publication. Have you made any inquiries? Can you be certain that that editorial oversight did not occur recently, while the research was being prepared for the very recent publication?

**VLADO PERKOVIC:** I don't have the specific timelines of the processes involved in that particular publication here at the moment. We'd have to take that on notice. But it is important, I think, to recognise the timelines. As we've said, editorial involvement can begin at the very beginning of any research. It doesn't necessarily mean it occurs at the end. Also, perhaps it's important to recognise that often publication takes place many months or sometimes even years after papers are finalised and submitted.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What inquiries have you made about this matter?

**VLADO PERKOVIC:** We've certainly looked into this matter internally. David, I don't know if you can comment on any specifics. I don't have those at hand.

**DAVID CROSS:** What I can say is that we, at this stage, are confident that the university at all times has abided by the requirements that we have in relation to the sanctions that have been imposed on Iran by the Government. We obviously are continuing to work with the Commonwealth in relation to making sure that we are always doing research that's both in the national interest but also, obviously, does not breach sanctions obligations. The other point that is important to note is that the paper you're referring to—the research is fundamental in nature, as is other references to this work in the media.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But we would all agree, wouldn't we, that applications come from fundamental research, and without fundamental research, there are no applications?

**DAVID CROSS:** To a degree, but I think the important thing to note here is that this is not work that's been done for the Iranian Government. This is work that is publicly available. It's not work that has direct military applications. As I said, we're confident that the university at this point in time is abiding by all the obligations that are required of us under the sanctions.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** You have a campus at ADFA, do you not?

**VLADO PERKOVIC:** Yes, we do.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Have you made inquiries there in relation to research, and have you made inquiries of any of your researchers who have access to any research that might be occurring at ADFA?

**DAVID CROSS:** We always make sure that sensitive research happening at UNSW happens with the appropriate barriers around it so that it always serves the national interest.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** And this research with collaborators from Iran and China was not considered sensitive research?

**DAVID CROSS:** This research didn't relate to any of the work we're doing at ADFA.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Was this sensitive research, given the research partners?

**DAVID CROSS:** No.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** How do you define sensitive research?

**DAVID CROSS:** No, the nature of the research, in and of itself, as I said, was not. It wasn't something that had direct military applications; it was something that was fundamental in nature. Whether a piece of research is sensitive or not depends largely on a whole range of different factors but, obviously, work that we do directly concerning the Australian Defence Force and the work that we do with ADFA, of course, is sensitive. Of course we make sure that the appropriate guardrails are in place.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Professor Dowton, perhaps I could come to you. Will you table the full unredacted preliminary assessment report into Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** We have already put into the public domain a modestly redacted version of the initial inquiry, so-called, into the ARC request for us to investigate Dr Abdel-Fattah. The redactions that are in that document are important ones. They are individuals and names who appear throughout the document, either raised by reviewers or Dr Abdel-Fattah herself under privacy obligations to those individuals. We believe that it is important that they are redacted. The other major part of the document which is redacted, and we believe has good grounds to be redacted, is that which pertains to the ethics clearance, because those are confidential matters. I would take advice on whether, if we provided a copy of that, the redactions could be maintained intact or would be held in camera, in confidence, to the members of the Committee that you have there. I would need to take advice on that.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I understand that, Professor. I understand that part of the redactions included the description of the preliminary assessment process. Is that the case?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** I don't have the document in front of me at the moment. It's a very long document. I'd have to go and re-read that to determine an answer to that. I can provide that on notice.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** If you could provide it on notice, and if it is the case that the description of the preliminary assessment process has been redacted, I think we'd be very curious on notice also to find out why that's so secret and why that should have been the subject of any redactions.

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**CORRECTED**

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**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** My recollection is—I'm not sure where the honourable member has received that information. Again, without the document in front of me, I can't speak to it except to say that the way the investigation was conducted was in line with the national code for responsible research, which our own Macquarie University code closely mirrors. The procedure involved responding to a specific set of questions from the ARC, and that was done by our research integrity office with significant input from two internationally respected experts in the field who were highly vetted before they were involved and have had no association with anyone at Macquarie University in their own work. That is the essence of the process which was conducted. I will go away and look into what has been redacted and, if there is something about process, why that was done. But my recollection—and, again, I don't have it here—is that it's not detail we redacted.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I would appreciate receiving that on notice. I completely understand why it may be appropriate to redact the names of certain persons. I'm curious as to why you think it's necessary to redact parts of the approval process for the ethics application.

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** It's not so much, as I recall, the process of the ethics but the content of the ethics. Again, in considering the conduct of research of many different types—I'm not speaking about laboratory or bench research here where there are different sorts of ethical issues involved. In the sort of research that we're talking about here, there are important issues of, again, individuals who are making statements about the work that they're going to conduct, who they might consult by name, and so on and so forth. That is a part of the ethics clearance process.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But if the names were redacted, what about the rest of the approval process needs to be redacted?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** Let me take that on notice for the honourable member, and I'd be happy to come back when I've looked at the document again. My understanding is that it would be regarded as standard practice in a research environment, in these sorts of matters, that redactions of matters in relation to ethics clearance would be the norm.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I want to ask about a range of the activities undertaken as part of the grant in question. These activities included the so-called "children's excursion", being the lead research on the *Anti-Palestinian Racism in Australian Schools report* with APAN and the so-called "jars workshop". Is it broadly correct that they were part of the grant?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** Certainly the original application, which Dr Abdel-Fattah made to the ARC for the grant, would have been reviewed by a panel from the College of Experts appointed by ARC, and the ARC would have received the report back from that review of the grant. In that original grant, Dr Abdel-Fattah made it entirely clear that she was an activist, that she would be attending protests and that that would be part of her research. Yes, that was a part of the original approved grant.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Did Dr Abdel-Fattah have ethics approval for the kids' excursion?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** I don't believe that was part of research. It was being conducted as a part of her own—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sorry, Professor. I'm a little confused because I thought we just said that those activities were part of the original grant, and now we're hearing that there was no ethics approval for this particular project because it wasn't part of the grant. Which one is it?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** I think we need to be careful here. What I spoke to earlier was that the application in the grant spoke to activism as a broad category of her professional and her personal life. The grant application did not go into specifics around which particular protest or which particular activism she might do on which particular date, because she clearly would not have known what was going to happen some years after the original grant was made.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Professor, are you suggesting that she received an ARC grant to engage in activism?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** What I'm saying is that grant records that in her grant she makes it very clear that she is an activist and that she would be attending protests as a part of her research. She certainly did not make any specific reference in the application to attending any of the particular protest activities that you're referring to in specificity.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But part of the initial application that was approved indicated that she would be engaging in activism as part of the research, and that was funded by the ARC.

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** Correct.



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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** The total amount of that grant was? Do you have that handy, Professor?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** It's just a little over \$800,000, I believe, over five years.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** My understanding is that Dr Abdel-Fattah has argued that the kids' excursion—where schoolchildren were taken to the encampment at the University of Sydney and encouraged to chant "intifada", among other things—was justified on the basis of either ethnography or participant observation. Were ethnography or participant observation included in the ethics application, as far as you're aware? Because you would have seen the unredacted report.

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** Certainly my understanding is that Dr Abdel-Fattah is an ethnographer in the field of sociology. Sociology is quite a broad field. Ethnography as a technique within that field is quite a broad field, so my presumption is that it would have been part of the original grant application, and the ethics clearance would reflect the grant application. But, as I say, it's a broad categorisation of a—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But we're not able to see the ethics application, are we? Because that has been redacted.

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** As I indicated earlier, I'm happy to go back and look at the detail of what the redactions are in that and take advice about the provision of that for the Committee.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What were the reasons why this grant needed to be investigated in the first place, Professor Dowton?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** The origins of the investigation of Dr Abdel-Fattah's work, which came from a request by the ARC to the university as the administering organisation, I believe was provoked by media reports raising concerns about Dr Abdel-Fattah. My understanding is that is what the ARC discerned over and decided, based upon content of statements that Dr Abdel-Fattah may have made in settings, that they wanted us to conduct an investigation in quite specific areas around the conduct of the research.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Did those remarks that Dr Abdel-Fattah was quoted as saying include references to bending the rules?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** My understanding is, yes, they did. We have not ever seen a full transcript of what she said. We have asked for a full transcript of what was originally said, and we were not able to be provided with that.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Did you ask Dr Abdel-Fattah for that transcript?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** We asked the university where the particular meeting was being conducted, where statements were apparently made to provide us with a copy of that transcript, which we would regard, by the way, as the authoritative transcript.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** You would understand, would you, Professor Dowton, that, for a layperson, somebody putting in research funding for activism and then claiming that participating in activism is research does look like bending the rules?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** I don't think Dr Abdel-Fattah's remark as reported in the news media, about bending the rules, was connected with the statement you just made.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** What rules was she bending then, or was she claiming to be bending then, Professor Dowton?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** My understanding is that when she made that statement she was referring to conducting an alternative form of research, then organising an academic conference.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Isn't participating in activism, according to Dr Abdel-Fattah, an alternative form of research?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** Yes, it is, but she had a specific form of research in mind. As I understand, from my memory of the reports from some time ago, she had a specific form of convening of individuals in mind, not a traditional academic conference. But again, I would stress that—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** We've lost your sound, Professor Dowton. I don't know whether you can hear me. We've lost your sound.

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** Sorry, it dropped in and out a bit at your end too. My understanding is that the specifics of what we've seen, and the reviewers that we had review this, were only what was reported in the news media, not a full transcript to put things in context.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Thank you. My time has elapsed. I might come back to you later.

**The CHAIR:** Just a couple of questions for you, Professor Readman. Can you confirm that UTS is anticipating a compound annual rate of 6 per cent, so a net revenue of around \$1.5 billion, in 2030?

**KYLIE READMAN:** I don't know the exact year in which we are expecting to return into surplus.

**The CHAIR:** It's been reported that the \$90 million deficit that was predicted in 2024, that underpinned the UTS Operational Sustainability Initiative, was overstated by more than 2½ times and that the true figure is more like \$35 million. Is that correct?

**KYLIE READMAN:** Can you repeat the question? Sorry.

**The CHAIR:** There was a \$90 million deficit predicted in 2024, and that underpinned the UTS Operational Sustainability Initiative. It was reported that in a presentation to staff in December 2025 the true figure was stated as being \$35 million. Is that correct?

**KYLIE READMAN:** I can't recall the exact presentation that you're talking about, so I'm happy to take it on notice. Obviously there are a number of factors that go into the final financial position of the university. I'm happy to come back to you on that.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have an estimate of what the software expenses for UTS are projected to grow at? Again, it's been reported that it's around—a projection growing at a compound annual rate of 9.2 per cent.

**KYLIE READMAN:** What I can say about that is that over the past few years, to help manage the deficit that we're in, we've taken a very lean approach to our investment in software and that, as we move back into surplus, which is predicted from 2028, we intend to catch up on some of the investment in software and other important areas of our capital infrastructure that currently we are underspending on.

**The CHAIR:** How much is UTS intending to spend on Workday?

**KYLIE READMAN:** The overall cost for Workday over a number of years—and I'll just check what it is exactly, if you don't mind just waiting for a second. Obviously it's a very complex multi-year project. The overall cost—I can't find it in front of me. If you don't mind, just give me a second.

**The CHAIR:** You're okay. While you're looking for that, can I just ask all of you, which of you use Nous as a consulting firm for major pieces of work?

**MAX LU:** Yes, we use Nous—mainly a subscription to the benchmarking model for UniForum.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, so you use it. Who else uses Nous? Does anyone else subscribe to that benchmarking—

**VLADO PERKOVIC:** We previously did. I think we withdrew from it in the last 12 months or so, off the top of my head. I'd need to check the details.

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** Macquarie University is the same as stated by Professor Lu. We use them for the UniForum benchmarking, not as consultants otherwise.

**The CHAIR:** Anyone else?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I can say at Western Sydney University the default is no for using consultants. In the past, yes, Nous have been used, but not at the moment, no.

**The CHAIR:** So you're not part of their current benchmarking project?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** No, not that I'm aware.

**KYLIE READMAN:** In relation to that question about Nous, if you're speaking about the teaching effort analysis work, that might be the benchmarking activity that you're referring to.

**The CHAIR:** I don't think so, no. Is UTS part of the benchmarking—

**KYLIE READMAN:** The UniForum? I'm just not sure what you're talking about. We have engaged with Nous before for various activities.

**The CHAIR:** What is the teaching effort analysis then?

**KYLIE READMAN:** It's a product that Nous utilises to benchmark a range of universities from a teaching effort perspective.

**The CHAIR:** What does teaching effort mean?

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**KYLIE READMAN:** Teaching effort, broadly speaking, is to do with the amount of time and effort and workload that's allocated for teaching and teaching-related activities.

**The CHAIR:** So it's like a productivity measure?

**KYLIE READMAN:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Interesting. Every day I learn something new about Nous. Again, this question is really for all of you. Last estimates I asked about adjustments for students with disability and how that was applied. Obviously students are coming out of high schools where there is a program of reasonable adjustments that get applied in various assessment scenarios. I think last time it was a bit of a mixed response and people weren't really sure whether they did anything on that. Has anyone got anything to report to me about it?

**VLADO PERKOVIC:** I can say that UNSW has a Disability Inclusion Action Plan. That's overseen by a committee. It applies to policy, practice, delivery of services and commits the university to removing barriers for people with disability and it encourages the employment of people with disability at all levels of the university. It was developed after extensive consultation with a steering committee and a project team, and we're working through that to ensure that both our built and digital environment are accessible for everyone.

**The CHAIR:** If I'm a student and I have an exam coming up and I need adjustments, how do I know how to apply for those adjustments? Is it different at every uni? Does it depend on a university policy?

**ANNAMARIE JAGOSE:** At the University of Sydney it would depend on our Disability Inclusion Action Plan. We have an Inclusion and Disability Services unit, which supported last year just over 3,000 students with disability. That's an increase from 2024. We are seeing increases in students registering as living with disability, so affordances in relation to assessment would be a common request. To give an example, someone who has, say, an attention disability might only be able to sit an exam in a room with a very small number of students or even alone, and so we provide invigilated solo spaces, for example. So there is a learning plan for students who register with a disability. And, as I say, there are significant numbers of those at the university.

**The CHAIR:** In terms, then, of any disputes over what is a reasonable adjustment for a student with disability, how is that determined at your university?

**ANNAMARIE JAGOSE:** It would go through our usual appeals process. To the best of my knowledge, we don't have a high number of appeals coming out of that process. There is a fairly generous and standard provision taken not just at the point of requirement—i.e. say at an examination period—but right from when students enrol they can register and understand what the sort of spread of services and affordances are offered to them.

**The CHAIR:** I might come back to that because my office gets quite a lot of individuals contacting who have disability and they are finding obstacles in the university environment, particularly in getting the reasonable adjustments that they would have had when they were at school and they are now not getting at university. I'm just curious as to whether anyone is doing that better than anyone else, or if it's just something included in the disability inclusion action plans.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Certainly at our end, we recognise that there's a legal entitlement to have these plans in place. We had 1,871 students who had an academic reasonable adjustment plan in place last year. Of those, a very high number were for mental health, which we've seen post-pandemic particularly being a major concern of the students. We do know that the inability—if these plans are not put in place, that's a reason why students often fail to complete their studies. It's a major barrier for people with disabilities. But I'd also say it's really about holistic coverage for these people. We often see people in this category aren't simply suffering from issues with disabilities. It may be food. It may be devices. It's a range of issues. At our end the approach is wraparound support to ensure we deal with their wellbeing on all factors in order to give them the best chance of succeeding at their studies.

**ANNAMARIE JAGOSE:** Is your question strictly about changes in accessible work or are you interested in other kinds of support for students.

**The CHAIR:** These questions are really around reasonable adjustments.

**KYLIE READMAN:** I'm happy to speak on a couple of points. Last year with students we established the academic administration working group to look at things as a working party of teaching and learning committee, which I chair, to look at the kinds of things that were barriers to students engaging. Special consideration, which is one of the forms of accommodation that you were talking about, was one of the things that students wanted to pay attention to—particularly around where someone's attendance at university was affected by occasional illness, rather than an ongoing chronic condition which presents in the same way every

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week. We've had a number of student groups also working on that. So we're looking to now make changes to our special consideration policy to enable that.

I would agree with Professor Williams about the access plan and the accommodations. Once a student has established an access plan with our accessibility team, those accommodations are granted. They don't have to continue to go back and forth with every subject coordinator, every semester, to ensure that those accommodations are made available. The team works with them on their behalf to make sure that they don't have to be the ones advocating for themselves at each point. So that's just a couple of things. We also did respond to your question from 10 March. I wasn't here, obviously, but on notice, so there's some documentation and numbers about that in there.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Professor Lee, when you served as the New South Wales Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, did you ever exercise your power to request a report on the commercial activities of a New South Wales university?

**GEOFF LEE:** I can't remember, to be honest with you. That was more than five years ago.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Do you remember if you ever requested a report from the Western Sydney University on its commercial operations, utilising specifically section 32D of the Western Sydney University Act?

**GEOFF LEE:** No, I can't remember, to be honest.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I can appreciate that you might not be able to even take that on notice, so I won't ask you to take that on notice. Can I just establish, Professor Lee, if your central role—I appreciate you're deputy vice-chancellor, but are you working in any of the commercial arms of the university?

**GEOFF LEE:** I'm Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Western Sydney and External Engagement, but I'm not a member of any commercial activities that the university partakes in.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** So you're at arm's length. You're not dealing with any of those activities that the university undertakes?

**GEOFF LEE:** No, not to my knowledge.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** External engagement—I take that as stakeholder management. Is that normally what you do?

**GEOFF LEE:** We like to deal with our community groups and our industry groups and our potential employers.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Do you meet with Canterbury-Bankstown council?

**GEOFF LEE:** I haven't met with Bankstown.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You haven't met with Canterbury-Bankstown council?

**GEOFF LEE:** Not in my role.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Do you know who does meet with Canterbury-Bankstown council at the university? Is that a specific—is it under your team because you manage external engagement?

**GEOFF LEE:** I'd have to take that on notice. There are lots of people that deal with lots of parts of the university. We employ over 2,500 people, close to 2,500 people. So lots of academics and professionals deal with people right throughout Western Sydney and beyond. I don't know specifically, but I'm happy to take that on notice.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Professor Lee, the Minister stated earlier today that he does not intend to exercise his power under section 32D of the Act to request a report on the university's commercial activities. In the interests of transparency and good governance, will Western Sydney University proactively provide such a report, which they can under section 32C of the Act?

**GEOFF LEE:** Can I say I'll have to take that on notice in consideration of all the factors.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I might put that question also to yourself, distinguished Professor Williams.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** We'll take that on notice. I'm unaware of that exchange this morning in terms of specifically what was asked for, so happy to take it on notice.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I'll just turn to yourself, distinguished Professor Williams. Can I note that in your answers—and thank you for the responses that you provided that I put as supplementary questions last time. They were quite extensive, your answers, so I do thank you. I note that in your answers to supplementary questions on notice from the 29 August 2025 estimates hearing, you advised the Committee that on 8 September after the hearing that you did notify Canterbury-Bankstown council of the fact that about 31 per cent of the Bankstown campus tower would be occupied by commercial tenants. Do you recall what form the notification to Canterbury-Bankstown council took?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** No, I don't know the exact form. I'm happy to take that on notice but what I can also assist you with is, of course, this is referring to the lease and to the terms upon which TAFE has moved into the building. The lease indicates that "university purposes includes educational facilities of a university standard involving teaching and research," clearly including activities that TAFE would undertake. So there's no doubt on the reading of the contract that this would fit within that definition.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** That's because—who prepared the contract?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** It's before my time. It was a commercial contract.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** But who prepared the contract?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I'd have to take that on notice. I have no idea.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I can imagine that it might have been the university that prepared that contract. If you could take that on notice specifically whether it was yourselves or indeed Canterbury-Bankstown council that actually initiated the contract. I do have some questions about that university purpose and I did put that to the Minister earlier today. The notification that you undertook with Canterbury-Bankstown council, would you table a copy of that or provide a copy of that correspondence or documentation to the Committee?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I'd have to take that on notice because I'm not even sure what form it was in. So if I can please find out what form and then happy to respond.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** If it's in a form that can be tabled, I'll just ask that you also consider or take that on notice whether you will consider providing that to the Committee. Prior to 8 September, were there any informal discussions with the council regarding the use of the building by TAFE NSW?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Again, if it was, it was not with me. I will take that on notice and find out the answer.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** There must have been somebody from the university that must have had some discussions? It's quite recent, certainly in the last, I would imagine, 12 months.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** It may well be, but I don't have firsthand knowledge. I want to make sure I give you an accurate answer.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** My next question is about the contract and you have clarified that the term "university purpose" is in there. We will just clarify who particularly wrote that and on who's behalf. Did the council formally agree that the TAFE NSW occupation would constitute a university purpose? Do you know that?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I don't know the answer to that question. I'll take that on notice.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** If they did, could you provide the date and in what form?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Yes.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Was any independent legal advice obtained regarding the interpretation that a tenancy exceeding 25 per cent of net lettable area from TAFE NSW can still qualify as a university purpose?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I'm unaware of whether we got legal advice. I'm happy, again, to take that on notice. I would say the clause itself is clear in terms of indicating, as I indicated, an educational facility of a university standard involving teaching and research. Having visited that TAFE facility, these are world-class facilities that clearly meet that standard and, in my view, would clearly fit within that definition. In fact, I would also say that we're immensely proud of TAFE moving into the building. We owe great thanks to TAFE and the Minister for supporting this, because at our end we're—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Absolutely, they refurbished the building at \$70 million and are giving you \$5.26 million in funds over the next five years. I'd be grateful too, Distinguished Professor.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I'm particularly grateful because there's a real need to harmonise higher education in Australia.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** And you're only paying \$1 to Canterbury Bankstown council for the rent of the site.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Can I say on that as well, in terms of peppercorn rent, that doesn't account for the fact that there was, of course, full market value paid for that land—\$13 million—and there was an independent market evaluation. So in addition to the peppercorn rent, there was full value paid for the land to the council.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** On what legal basis—and you can take this on notice—did the university determine that occupation by TAFE NSW qualifies as a university purpose? Again, that'll come down to who instituted that or formed that into the contract.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I'll take that on notice.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Distinguished Professor, if the TAFE NSW tenancy was not deemed a university purpose, what would be the value of a commercial rent otherwise payable to the council?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I will take that on notice because, of course, it's to the contrary and I don't have an easy answer to that counterfactual. But we're happy to give you an answer to it.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Would the university have considered that, though, and perhaps some numbers around that?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I'm unaware. I don't know. I will take that on notice.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** If you can just take on notice whether it was measured at some point by the university.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Yes.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** At any point since you first notified council of the TAFE NSW tenancy, has council requested commercial rent from Western Sydney University rather than the peppercorn arrangement for the Bankstown campus?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Again, I'll take it on notice. I'm not aware of that being the case. As I mentioned, not only was the peppercorn rent paid, but we actually paid full value for the land according to an independent valuation as well.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I understand, but that happened prior to knowledge from either party that TAFE NSW would indeed become a tenant.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I'll make sure I get you a proper answer on notice for the full question.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** There's nothing different that you can add to that, Professor Lee?

**GEOFF LEE:** Nothing, no. I don't deal with any leases; I deal with partners.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You may not be able to answer this, but I will put it to you, Distinguished Professor. Are you aware if council sought its own legal advice regarding whether the arrangement complied with the ground lease?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I'm not aware, no.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Does the sublease to TAFE NSW also include extension or renewal options?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** It's a three-year lease with the ability to extend for two years, as I understand it. That's the advice I've received.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Earlier in estimates today Minister Whan did indicate—I think it was to Ms Merton—that the Government has not yet developed a business case for a permanent Bankstown TAFE beyond the expiry date of the current lease. What's your understanding of the permanency of Bankstown TAFE at Western Sydney University? Will it be your intention to try and keep TAFE NSW at the site beyond the "three year by two year" arrangement?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Of course, I have to recognise that's up to TAFE and the Government. That's not something we have control over. For us—and also, we'd say, the community there—there's enormous benefit in having the university and TAFE in the one building and actually having students with the ability to go up and down our floors to articulate and perform different forms of higher education. What we're working on with TAFE is things like joint entry—where they can both apply and start with TAFE and us at the same time—and success coaches for these students as well, so actually using it as a catalyst for really changing the way we deliver

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education in this area. For us, we'd like to have a long-term partnership, but we respect the fact that that's not our decision.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Professor Downton, perhaps I could come back to you. We were talking about Dr Abdel-Fattah's description of some of her research which was subverting established forms. That was the jars workshop, was it, that she was talking about?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** I believe that is likely correct. Again, I'll have to go back and look at what we have seen from the public reports of what she said to confirm that.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I understand that the report that you've received—and it's been partially made public—specifically raises the issue of a need to determine with regard to what research data, if any, might be able to be used from the jars workshops. Was any usable data produced?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** I'm not able to answer in detail on that. What I can confirm is that the preliminary assessment process identified that the workshop was a community engagement activity undertaken by Dr Abdel-Fattah—it was not a research exercise—and that Dr Abdel-Fattah has committed to leading a formal academic conference as a part of the requirements of her research grant.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** It subverted the research paradigm by not producing any research. Is that right?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** No, I would not characterise it in that way. The field of sociology, and specifically using the methodologies of ethnography and the sub-field of autoethnography—again, I would crave that the members of the Committee understand that I am a physician and biomedical scientist by background; these are not my disciplines. But my understanding is that these fields do involve immersion in communities to understand social dynamics. As I say, the original grant made very clear the sort of work she would be doing. I've just reflected upon, from my notes here that I do have with me, what the preliminary AE assessment opined on.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** But it remains true that apparently no usable data has been produced by that jars workshop?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** I can't speak to the specificity of that.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Have you made any inquiries, given that this was something that was flagged by the report as being needed?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** The inquiries that were made were ones where we have the international experts involved in this and the report—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** With respect, Professor, the international experts, who are the authors of the report, flagged that this was an area that needed to be considered. Has that been considered by the university?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** The university has responded to—has provided the report to the ARC. The ARC has confirmed that they are satisfied with the findings of the preliminary assessment. They have indicated to us that, from their perspective, the matter is now closed.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Has the university seen the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network report that Dr Abdel-Fattah co-authored while employed at the university?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** I can't speak to who would have seen that. I've not seen it personally.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** On notice, can you indicate whether that report constitutes a research output from Dr Abdel-Fattah?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** I can take that on notice, yes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** You had previously answered questions in relation to this research grant and other related matters, giving testimony before the Commonwealth Senate. Is that true?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** That is correct, yes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** On those occasions you indicated, certainly personally, that you considered that a number of the statements—and I do not propose to restate those statements here; I think they are sufficiently on the public record without me having to recite them again—could be construed as antisemitic. Is that true?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** Perhaps at this stage I might point out for the benefit of the Committee members that I have offered to give this evidence here today from an offshore location. I have been informed, based upon the Committee's advice, that the usual privileges of parliamentary privilege are not available to me in this

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hearing—which, as a parenthetical, I would say is quite extraordinary, but that's apparently the rule. So I'm not prepared to make any further comment on that at the moment.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** The comment I'm asking for, Professor, is for you to confirm that you said that at a public hearing.

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** I can confirm that, yes.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Can you indicate if any disciplinary action has been taken in relation to Dr Abdel-Fattah?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** I again would crave, as I have done in that Federal parliamentary hearing you mentioned earlier, that when the university is confronted by any staff issue that raises questions where different disciplinary action might be taken, those are matters which are conducted in accordance with our policies and processes—of course with due regard for the law, Federal and State—and that we do not make any public comment upon particular individual cases in that regard, with regard to the privacy laws of the State of New South Wales and other jurisdictions.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Is it your evidence, then, Professor Dowton, that you're unable to indicate whether or not the policies of the university, with respect to making racist, antisemitic statements, have been applied in respect of Dr Abdel-Fattah?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** What I have said a moment ago is when any concern is raised about any member of our staff, we conduct the relevant procedures. We maintain confidentiality around those for any particular individual.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Can I put it to you, Professor, that, with respect, when statements have been made in very public fora, and when those statements are, by employment, connected with the university, if the university, for whatever well-intentioned reason, remains very quiet about any response or reaction to those statements, they remain unchallenged. Is that your intention with respect to the antisemitic statements that have been made by Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah?

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Point of order: We are now delving into the employment relationship of one particular individual with Macquarie University. That is outside of the scope of this Committee and, I would suggest, inappropriate for that to be discussed, with that person not available to have any say.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** To the point of order: We are discussing the way in which standard university policies are applied and the balance point between privacy concerns and addressing public concerns.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Further to the point of order: Ms Carter has just repeatedly referred to one particular academic. It is quite clear who she is referring to.

**The CHAIR:** I think we do need to be quite aware of the procedural fairness rules. The academic who is being talked about is not here to defend themselves or put their point of view. I would caution the member around assigning particular words and characteristics to a person who is not here to defend themselves. Otherwise, I think the questions are in order.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Professor, can you comment on the general issue of how the university, as an important member of a cohesive society, addresses and upholds social cohesion if you are not free to publicly discuss statements made by any member associated with your community that may, in fact, raise issues of concern in relation to social cohesion?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** Thank you for the question. Perhaps I can give you some indication in broad terms about how my university and how I personally have handled the matter which you raise. I'm making no specific reference to any individual here. We are a community which is very committed to diversity and inclusion and celebrates difference in all of its forms. We have made repeated statements within our community and in many different fora, using many channels of communication, about our policies and procedures and that we have no tolerance for hate, violence or hate speech in our community.

We have taken a strong stand on this in multiple, different fora. Where appropriate, we've worked with other government agencies. I particularly commend the work that the NSW Police Force has helped us with when there was an antisemitic graffiti campaign on our campus. We had that taken down, with a cleaning crew coming along in the middle of the night to remove that and boarding up that which could not be removed by that crew, which was removed during the next day. The New South Wales police, working with us and closed-circuit television footage, apprehended individuals who were not part of our community and had nothing to do with the university.



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**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** I'm grateful for this discussion, much of the detail of which we are familiar with. We're really talking about public statements, rather than police and graffiti.

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** With respect, the issues around antisemitism in our society and other western democracies around the world span the whole of these things. It's not just about statements being made.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Perhaps I can ask you one last question before I hand over to my colleague. Do students and staff at Macquarie University who are Zionists have the right to cultural safety?

**S. BRUCE DOWTON:** All students and all staff, no matter whether they're Jewish or any particular faith tradition or ethnic background, have the right to safety. Of course they do.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If I could ask Professor Mark Scott in reference to—Professor, I refer you to an article that you may be familiar with from 16 November 2025 in *The Daily Telegraph*, which noted the University of Sydney took down its own flag and replaced it with the transgender flag to mark Transgender Awareness Week. Professor, were you aware that the Sydney University Regiment would be holding its 125th anniversary parade at the quadrangle at the same time that the university flag was taken down and replaced with the transgender flag?

**MARK SCOTT:** No, I was not aware of that, but the decision around the flag would've followed the flag policy that sets out the requirement for the use of flags on university infrastructure and the general display of flags on campus.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Professor Scott, do you think this was an appropriate and respectful way to recognise the regiment's long and distinguished contribution to the university? Wouldn't flying the university flag have been more appropriate?

**MARK SCOTT:** I don't want to get into the specifics of the matter, nor the views of the regiment. Can I say all these communities are important to us. The regiment has played a vital part in the history of the university, but we celebrate diversity in all its forms as well. We are a safe and inclusive community. When there was a request with a reason, following the policy that the other flag be flown, that decision was made. I'm not sure that there would've been a full assessment of all other activities that were happening on our campus at the same time.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Would it have been more appropriate for the university to fly the university flag itself, to take centre stage at the quadrangle, rather than the transgender flag, which is viewed as woke symbolism, a political symbol and political protest and statement, on the occasion of the anniversary of the regiment?

**MARK SCOTT:** I sense that's your view. I note your view. All I will say is that we follow our policy of flying flags on campus. We set out the requirements for that. If a decision was made to fly another flag than the university flag on the occasion, it followed that policy. What we are attempting to do is to be accepting, diverse, inclusive and respectful. I am not aware of correspondence to me from the regiment on that matter, but I might be mistaken on that.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** The Federal shadow education Minister, Julian Leeser, has made what I believe is a very valuable contribution at the recent Universities Australia Solutions Summit. He stated, "Group assignments should be scrapped as they are unfair and cheapen degrees." His argument, which I have some sympathy for, is that groupwork leads to one person doing most of the work and others get a free ride. It undermines individual merit and assessment integrity. How are group assignments used in assessments in Sydney University courses, and what percentage do they make up of student assessments?

**MARK SCOTT:** I think the provost is in a good position to answer this.

**ANNAMARIE JAGOSE:** I appreciate that group assignments attract an amount of attention, both inside the university and out. Students often feel anxious, particularly ambitious students—the sort of students we hope to attract. They often feel anxious about what are the guardrails around a group assessment, what if I get put in a group that's less capable than me, and will my marks suffer as a result. I'm quite empathetic with the anxiety, but I think we need to understand that how group assessments are both designed and assessed doesn't allow those situations to arise. For example, group assessments are often moderated in relation to peer assessment of how much participation and input individual group members have made.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** It's reported that at Sydney University, group assessments can be worth up to 30 per cent of the final assessment.

**ANNAMARIE JAGOSE:** That may well be true. I would have to take that on notice.

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**CORRECTED**

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**MARK SCOTT:** Can I simply add on this matter, if you think of the professions we are preparing students for—to be doctors, to be nurses, to be engineers, to be bridge builders, to be orchestra conductors, football coaches, politicians—all of these careers demand teamwork and demand working together with groups of people. You may not have chosen them, but they are the people you need to work with. The capability of working in a team, working with others, trying to find a way through to bring a solution together, is a skill that is prized in the workplace. When I speak to employers, it's a workplace capability that's esteemed. I would say, I appreciate the sentiment of the shadow Minister, and I appreciate that we have probably all had circumstances where we've struggled with group work. We need to work on assessments that are focused and constructive, but we should not walk away from the need of our students to be able to develop these capabilities.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** If I could look at AI and technology, there's currently an increasing threat of unregulated use of AI. Looking at student assessments and examinations—Professor Scott, maybe I could start with you, but if others want to contribute—what are we doing currently to mitigate the risk of the use of AI in student remote assessments and take-home examinations? How reliable is the current generation of AI detection software? Some think that we need to move to a different teaching and assessment model.

**MARK SCOTT:** It's very important, and I'm sure every university, like Sydney, is very engaged with these issues. I see two challenges here. One is that we need to equip our students to be able to use AI. They will be using AI or further tools emerging from AI for the rest of their careers. They need to have confidence and capability in using these tools, so we need to encourage that use. At the same time, we need to ensure that we have assessments with integrity, and we need to ensure that students are learning the work that we need them to learn. At the University of Sydney, we've developed a two-track model of assessments. There are some assessments where students are encouraged to use AI tools, and the assessment tools are designed for them to use AI tools. But there are other assessments that will be far more familiar to many in the room—sitting down in exam rooms, supervised pen-and-paper assessment, and oral assessments as well, where people are questioned on that.

**The Hon. RACHEL MERTON:** Further to that, there have been calls for the reintroduction of formal closed- and open-book attendance examinations and individual in-person presentations. Is that under consideration?

**MARK SCOTT:** No, it's not under consideration; we're doing it. We have said that we're doing it. It's part of our strategy. I suspect that more students will sit exams at the University of Sydney this semester than at any other time in our history. Those forms of assessment are back and are part of our assessment regimen now because we feel it's important as part of AI integrity.

**The CHAIR:** If I could come back to you, Professor Readman, what is the total amount that UTS has spent on external consultants in connection with both the Operational Sustainability Initiative and the Workday project?

**KYLIE READMAN:** In terms of consultants within the Operational Sustainability Initiative, we did use KPMG right at the beginning of the process. In terms of the services that they provided to us, the amount totalled just over \$7 million for a period from 2024 through to 2025. They engaged with us in a range of initial workshops and advisory work, did some diagnostic activity and contributed to a framework for detailed design, but that work and that contract is now completed. The Workday project I'll have to take on notice. I don't have that in front of me, I'm sorry.

**The CHAIR:** I understand that the university is spending \$77 million on the Workday enterprise resource planning system. Can you confirm that EY, your assurance partner on the project, has identified a breakdown in the relationship between the Workday program director and the systems integrator, Deloitte?

**KYLIE READMAN:** I can't speak to that specifically, but EY was brought on to do what would be a normal assessment of process at a point in time to make sure that the significant investment that we're making, as you've noted, is going smoothly and that, if it's not, there are the adjustments that would happen in a project that's this complex and requires engagement across the entire university.

**The CHAIR:** Is it true that EY found that the project lacks mechanisms to monitor and manage Deloitte's performance?

**KYLIE READMAN:** I'm not aware of the specifics of it, so I'll have to take it on notice.

**The CHAIR:** UTS also experienced the bungled ServiceNow implementation between 2019 and 2021, attributed to a lack of technical knowledge among program leaders and an inability to manage the main vendor. What lessons were learned from that failure, and why do the same patterns of external consultant dependency appear to be repeating themselves when it comes to Workday?

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**CORRECTED**

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**KYLIE READMAN:** When we use consultants, we use them for fixed-term and short activities that we wouldn't want to engage ongoing staff in. They bring specific skills and knowledge to the work that they do. Once again, the integration around operations to do with technology isn't my specific area, so I'll have to take it on notice in relation to ServiceNow. But that project, as I understand it, is complete, and ServiceNow is working at the university.

**The CHAIR:** The program director for the Workday project is an external consultant from CloudRock Asia and the systems integrator is Deloitte, with EY providing assurance. Given that UTS employs approximately 280 IT staff, with a budget of around \$134 million, why is the university relying on three layers of external consultants to manage a core technology project rather than drawing on its internal capabilities?

**KYLIE READMAN:** We are drawing on our internal capabilities as well but, as I just mentioned, when we're doing a short-term, complex piece of work, we will draw on external skill sets, and consultants are part of that. Also, the people that are doing the IT work within the IT unit at UTS have got jobs to do. They have already got work that they're employed to do within our operating model for IT. They can't just all be drawn away from that work to work on projects like this.

**The CHAIR:** In relation to the teaching effort analysis you were telling us about before, did you say that that is something that Nous was undertaking, or was it someone else that was undertaking that?

**KYLIE READMAN:** It's a product that Nous—if I've got that correct—offers to universities. I can come back to you with the detail on that.

**The CHAIR:** Are any of the other universities involved in that teaching effort analysis product?

**MARK SCOTT:** Not that we're aware of, no.

**The CHAIR:** Another one for you, Professor Readman. I understand that there was another underpayments issue resulting from your payroll system. Where are you at with repaying those latest underpayments?

**KYLIE READMAN:** The wage remediation process that we've got underway, which we identified first in 2019, as I understand it, identified some underpayments, and that work is ongoing. It has been taking some time to complete, because of course, underpayments that we've identified for individuals apply to a range of people both still working at the university and people who've left. Trying to identify those people and make sure that we repay them appropriately does take some time.

**The CHAIR:** You say 2019. Was that the casual wage theft, or was that—

**KYLIE READMAN:** That was the underpayment of wages. Where it first became apparent that there might be an issue, we proactively engaged with Deloitte and proactively agreed to an enforceable undertaking with the Fair Work Ombudsman at that time, and we've been working through—

**The CHAIR:** That's the only underpayments issue that you've had? You haven't had a more recent one?

**KYLIE READMAN:** Yes, there has been a more recent one. That again relates to the incorrect use of a particular form that then didn't identify—I'm sorry, I'm just trying to recall as I go through this. That was to do with agreed hours for casual staff, if that's what you're referring to. We then had to go back and have a look at that, and we are working on that. We are absolutely committed to making sure that people get the correct payment for the work that they've done, and I apologise on behalf of the university for the people who've been impacted by that over time. We are seeking to address that completely and fully.

**The CHAIR:** What's the value of the underpayments?

**KYLIE READMAN:** It's still a work in progress. The total cost for the remediation process is currently \$41 million, including interest and superannuation. That provision has been made to make sure that we address it.

**The CHAIR:** How many staff did that impact?

**KYLIE READMAN:** I don't have that in front of me, I'm afraid. I'm happy to provide that information to you on notice.

**The CHAIR:** The total cost for the remediation process, then?

**KYLIE READMAN:** That's currently at \$41 million.

**The CHAIR:** Right, so that's the entire process including the amount that's been underpaid? How much was underpaid?

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**CORRECTED**

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**KYLIE READMAN:** What I've got in front of me is that a provision of \$26.9 million has been made that relates to unpaid former academic employees and professional staff, and there are some things that still require validation through the process.

**The CHAIR:** We've had a few of these at different universities, and I know that there's quite a cost in calculating the underpayment and going through the remediation process. Do you know how much that part of this is going to cost?

**KYLIE READMAN:** I don't. I'll take it on notice and make sure we provide that information.

**The CHAIR:** That is useful. We heard from Deloitte that they're seeking and delivering ongoing IT services contracts with universities. There have been some concerns expressed from individuals at universities that there's a bit of a replacement going on of IT staff with external contractors, particularly Deloitte, where their people are sitting within buildings in the university and fulfilling those roles that used to be fulfilled by permanent staff. Is that happening at UTS at all?

**KYLIE READMAN:** I'm not aware of that happening. They obviously are working with us on the Workday project, so it wouldn't be unreasonable to say they'd be co-located for a period of time. But in terms of replacing ongoing roles, I'm not aware of that happening, but I'm happy to ask the question and find out for you.

**The CHAIR:** Has anyone else experienced that at their universities—a sort of co-location of IT experts on a more than ad hoc basis? I'm not surprised no-one's volunteering to answer that. That's fair. I think we heard previously it was a University of Sydney underpayment, where they'd spent more on calculating the cost of the underpayment than what had been repaid at a certain point. Can I ask Sydney Uni, do you have any underpayments outstanding?

**MARK SCOTT:** We have an underpayment process that's still working its way through on a timetable that's been agreed with the Fair Work Ombudsman. Much of that work has been completed, but it's still being resolved on the agreed timetable with the Fair Work Ombudsman.

**The CHAIR:** What is the total cost of the remediation process?

**MARK SCOTT:** I can give you figures on the remediation payments. I don't think I have a cost on the process. I can take that on notice for you.

**The CHAIR:** On notice, that would be great.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I will go back to the University of Western Sydney. Professor Williams, I wanted to clarify again, so I can be clear—I think I asked you already. Once council was notified that TAFE NSW would indeed be a tenancy, I understand that you said earlier that university purpose and that particular wording was already in the arrangement. I wanted to know if there was any new contractual arrangement between Western Sydney University and council following your agreement that you may have reached with the State Government?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Not that I'm aware of, but please let me take that on notice so I can check.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Can you also clarify for me, did Canterbury-Bankstown Council formally approve the classification of TAFE NSW's tenancy as a university purpose? And if they did, by what form of communication?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Again, not that I'm aware of, but I'll check that as well.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Are there any cost-sharing agreements between Western Sydney University and TAFE NSW in relation to the tower's operations? Beyond the lease arrangement, are there other cost-sharing arrangements?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Again, I don't want to answer definitively. Not that I'm aware of, but I will again get back to you on notice.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** They're coinciding in the one building. There must be some ongoing operational costs that they're sharing.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Again, please let me get you the right answer to that, accurately.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Can I put this to Professor Lee? Do you recall ever in your time previously as the Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education whether a similar arrangement for TAFE NSW would lease from a university campus in New South Wales?

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**CORRECTED**

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**GEOFF LEE:** I can't specifically—Ourimbah may be the only case. I think the university up there—I think TAFE at Ourimbah leases from the university at that site, but I could be misled.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** You don't recall ever negotiating any arrangement in your time where TAFE NSW—

**GEOFF LEE:** I didn't negotiate, no. That would have been up to TAFE people to do the negotiation. Ministers don't negotiate the leases. Ourimbah, I think, is a classic case of a TAFE being on a university campus, a shared precinct.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Just depends what the contractual arrangement is.

**GEOFF LEE:** I don't have access to that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I'll ask the TAFE Minister for that. Distinguished Professor Williams, in your answers to previous supplementary questions—and I'm just going to bring you to the sale of Milperra land—on notice regarding the sale of the university's former land in Milperra, you mentioned the project development agreement with Mirvac. What is the estimated total development value of the remaining Milperra land?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I don't have an estimate of that at this point, because it's still a process that is underway.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Do you know what the share of revenue is that's expected to be received by Western Sydney University?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** No, I don't. Again, I'm happy to look further into that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Can you take that on notice?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Yes.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Did the university enter into negotiations with the New South Wales Government or the Department of Education about acquiring land for school use, to the best of your knowledge?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Are you talking about the Milperra—

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Milperra, yes.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Again, this was before my time. I don't know the answer, I'll take that on notice.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** I appreciate that, thank you. When's the anticipated timeline for the finalisation of the Milperra development?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Again, I know it's subject to a project development agreement with Mirvac. There's a lot that can't be finalised. But again, I'll give you a full answer to that question.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Can I also ask what the university has done with the \$24.8 million that it's already received from the sale of the partial Milperra land holdings?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** That I can answer. In that case, that's been put in our corpus, and the interest returns are used to support teaching, learning and research at the university. That's in accordance with section 8C of our Act, which specifically authorises us with those arrangements to support the mission of the university.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Has the Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education ever sought a briefing from you in relation to what happened with respect to Milperra or what's been developed?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Not that I can recall, no.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Has the Minister ever sought a meeting with you in relation to TAFE NSW being at Bankstown campus?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I don't think so, no, never sought a meeting. But it's something that, as I said, we're very proud of. We've certainly talked to many people about it, and we think it's a world-class example of what a university and TAFE should be doing. I've certainly said to the Minister and others on many occasions how we think this will be a game changer for Bankstown.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** At the moment, do you know how many students are onsite at Bankstown campus, or are enrolled this year? You can take that on notice.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Including TAFE as well?

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** If you've got the figures for TAFE, that would be wonderful.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Again, let me take that on notice, because we're in the middle of the process at the moment of recruitment.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** TAFE has just started. I understand that.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** We haven't got the census date yet. Once we get to census date, which comes up in a few weeks, we'll have those figures.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Obviously, university students get a student card or something. I assume that TAFE students get that too. Are they both being given the same access to the general facilities of the campus?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** It depends on the facilities. There are some areas, for example, which are limited to certain types of students. Indeed, our facilities are also open to high school students. We invite them onto our campus to get used to a university or TAFE experience. But there are some areas, of course—active classrooms and the like—which we close down for those students.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** But there must be a card or some sort of identification for university students that would differ from the TAFE students.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I would imagine so. I'm happy to give you an answer on notice. But TAFE would run its own processes; we would run our own processes as well. I'm happy to give you an accurate answer to that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Earlier, I asked the Minister about some of the security issues that he and the department might have to have considered, particularly since the Bondi terrorist attack. I might put that same question to you. Does Western Sydney University have a framework to identify early signs of violent extremism or radicalisation among students on any of their campuses?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** We don't have a framework specifically designed for that. We actually think we've got something that's more effective.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** What is that?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** We apply a behaviour risk based management approach for identifying and responding to concerning behaviour that might present a safety risk. We've got a multidisciplinary behaviour review and risk operational group. It brings together representatives from work health and safety, student wellbeing, complaints management, legal and campus security. They have a standing weekly meeting to assess these issues. It makes sure that we're always on top of these issues and are able to keep our staff, students and community safe and protected.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Have any of these policies been reviewed in light of the attack at Bondi?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Yes. In fact, we've gone through a very active process after that. Immediately after that process, we did a very careful look through of our campus security to look at our preparedness and assurance activities. That included existing security arrangements, so looking at our operations. There's a range of things we did on the back of that, including looking at our graduation ceremonies, for example, which were immediately after that period. I would say in this area that we recognise our responsibilities, and we always must be vigilant. In terms of reviewing policy, that happens all the time in light of any major threat that may emerge.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Further to that review, does that also examine your cybersecurity issues and any issues relating to what could be potentially downloaded at the campuses? Does the university have capacity to at least assist the police or other agencies in reviewing some of the data that is potentially downloaded that could be construed as either extreme violence or certainly radicalisation?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** We certainly have appropriate-use policies that do affect those things. We're also very aware of our reporting obligations to police and other agencies. We really value our partnership with police, particularly in the cybersecurity area. We've had a number of attacks at our university. I can't speak in great detail because there's a person currently before the courts on that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** That's fine.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** But I would give a big thanks to the police, who've been quite extraordinary to work with. We would not be in the stronger position we are now but for that partnership.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Is the way you monitor what's being downloaded something that you outsource? Who would assist that with you?

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**CORRECTED**

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**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Can we take that on notice, because that's at an operational level? I don't want to guess at that, so please let me give you a proper answer.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Do you have a formal arrangement, did you say, with New South Wales police specifically? Or is it just on a needs basis?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** No, it's not a formal arrangement. We do have in place 24/7 cyber monitoring, for example. That's one of the lessons we've learnt from the attacks that we were subject to. We've got a very highly developed risk framework and the like for dealing with these matters. We engage with not just the police but, of course, Home Affairs on the national level. There's a range of agencies, and we pride ourselves in having strong, positive relationships. They're based upon us working in partnership with those wherever required. I need also to say that, of course, we recognise very much our responsibilities to academic freedom, to protest and other things on our campuses—to uncomfortable conversations. But as our chancellor, Jennifer Westacott, has made clear, there are certainly very clear lines that cannot be crossed in this area when it comes to hate speech.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Has the university requested advice from the Commonwealth security agencies about heightened risks of radicalisation among young people in educational settings?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** I will take on notice the formal, but we often have conversations. It's a common thing for us to do across a range of matters. But let me take that specific one on notice because I wasn't party to that. I'll need to check if somebody else was.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** This is a question to everybody. You'd be aware of the NHMRC study that was led out of QUT which raised significant issues in relation to the quality of cancer research and how it's been deeply affected by AI. In fact, it suggested that there were more than a quarter of a million published papers on cancer research that are potentially false and flagged issues with AI in the research process. What steps are you taking in terms of not only your own research, but applications from PhD students and employment applications that are citing papers? What steps are you taking to ensure that it's actual research rather than AI hallucination?

**ANNAMARIE JAGOSE:** I'm not aware of the research at QUT that you're referring to.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** It's an NHMRC study that was funded by them and led by QUT. It's a significant—I'm surprised you're not aware of it. Are any of the other universities aware of this? What efforts do people take to make sure they're across all the current issues with quality of academic research?

**ANNAMARIE JAGOSE:** I can certainly answer that part of the question. At the University of Sydney—as doubtless at other universities—we have established research integrity frameworks, part of which are educational, both for staff and, as you mentioned, HDR students.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Given the prevalence now of AI, what additional measures have you in place to check AI and the misuse of AI in terms of, essentially, AI-written papers that are not based on accurate research?

**ANNAMARIE JAGOSE:** Let me address the HDR student issue. For example, when students propose projects or represent their own work—

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** You're not understanding my question, perhaps. What new measures do you now have in place to address the AI challenge?

**ANNAMARIE JAGOSE:** I understand the question. If I could finish my answer, I'd probably come to some agreement. Where in the past we used to let the written representation stand as the representation for the student, in an AI environment we're much keener to talk to students specifically to understand their background, their training, what they're proposing, and to test whether or not they have the capacities and capabilities that they represent themselves as having. You've also mentioned publication. Universities don't publish researchers' work themselves. They're published generally in independent peer-refereed journals.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Sorry, what I meant was using publications as part of a job application or an HDR application. That was what I was talking about.

**ANNAMARIE JAGOSE:** Our usual research integrity would apply there too, where we would be wanting to talk to people much more and test the integrity of those research outputs.

**The Hon. SUSAN CARTER:** Perhaps on notice, because my time has expired, everybody can let me know what their attitude is to that.

**The Hon. TANIA MIHAILUK:** Very quickly, if I can ask the distinguished professor for Western Sydney, Mr Wissam Haddad was found by the Federal Court to have disseminated racist and antisemitic material in July last year. He was also associated with the Al Madina Dawah Centre in Bankstown. You can probably take

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**CORRECTED**

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this on notice, but has Mr Haddad been invited, either formally or informally, to any campus of Western Sydney? Did he give a lecture or sermon in the prayer hall, for example? Has any representative of the Al Madina Dawah Centre also been invited to the campuses?

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Not to my knowledge, but I'll answer that on notice to confirm.

**The CHAIR:** That brings us to Government question time, if you'd like to ask any.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Sure. I'll kick off. Professor Lu, there was an article in the *Illawarra Mercury* yesterday which quoted you extensively. Are you aware of that article?

**MAX LU:** Yes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You're alleged to have said that one of the key values of the university is transparency, and it would apply to executive decision-making, just as it does across the university. Do you stand by that comment?

**MAX LU:** Yes, absolutely. I think I'm very proud to have led the university since I started last May, not only to launch a new strategy, Vision 2035, but also we launched Values in Action a couple of weeks ago. This is something that I'm committed to—leading the university with transparency.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Those values, I think they're also listed. You're quoted as saying that the values are honesty, transparency and authenticity, always acting with integrity, and upholding the standards, policies and laws that guide us. You stand by that statement?

**MAX LU:** Yes, absolutely.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You appeared before the Social Issues Committee on 17 December last year. That's right?

**MAX LU:** Yes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Also appearing on that day was Marisa Mastroianni, the head of the UOW Global Enterprises. Yes?

**MAX LU:** Yes.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** UOW Global Enterprises is a wholly owned entity, wholly controlled by the University of Wollongong. Yes?

**MAX LU:** Correct.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You're aware that in that hearing, Ms Mastroianni was asked a question about her salary?

**MAX LU:** Yes, I'm aware of that.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** The answer that was returned was returned in combination with the answers taken on notice by the university. That's correct? There was one package, basically, of returned answers from the University of Wollongong?

**MAX LU:** Yes, that's correct.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Did you sign off on that answer?

**MAX LU:** I didn't sign off on her answer, I think, because there's a distinction here. The wholly owned subsidiary has separate governance.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Sorry, Professor Lu, there was one document returned by Wollongong. You're the head of that organisation. I'm assuming that this document that was returned was signed off by you.

**MAX LU:** Yes, I had a read of it. Of course, I wouldn't be across all the details, and I actually have—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Did you approve it being submitted to the Committee as an answer?

**MAX LU:** Yes, I did.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** When someone asks you, "How much are you paid?", what do you understand as the answer that's expected to be returned?



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**CORRECTED**

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**MAX LU:** If I was asked that question, I'll give you a straight answer. But if it's a subsidiary company's CEO, whose employment relations and conditions are subject to a separate governance mechanism—and that is the board—they have returned that answer, so I can't overrule that.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You've approved that answer to be returned in the name of the university.

**MAX LU:** Yes, but I have no control over how the board of Global Enterprises determined the remuneration and what the precise conditions under which—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** It's a wholly controlled entity, isn't it? You just gave that answer on the record.

**MAX LU:** Yes, a wholly controlled entity that also has to comply with ASIC rules.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Are you saying that you do not know what the salary is?

**MAX LU:** Honestly, I don't know what his salary is.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** So you're happy for a wholly owned entity, a wholly controlled entity, to return a non-answer to a question from a parliamentary Committee? You're happy for that to occur?

**MAX LU:** I can take that on notice. I'm going to ask—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You have to take on notice whether you're happy to return a non-answer to a question?

**MAX LU:** No, I'm saying that I signed off on the return of the package at the time. I'm going to ask further whether we can get an answer on that question.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Do you think that accords with your commitment to honesty and transparency?

**MAX LU:** Yes, I'm committed to transparency and honesty. Honestly, I don't know the answer. I don't know the number. I can't give you the number.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** But you signed off on the response. When you signed off the response, did you not say, "This is an inadequate answer to the question that was asked; if we're going to be honest and transparent, we're going to give a full and complete answer"? You signed that off, didn't you?

**MAX LU:** Yes, but there were reasons—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** How can you say that that's being transparent?

**MAX LU:** I'm being transparent because there was reasons for the subsidiary company's CEO not to give any number. I took it that this is a subsidiary matter.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** The question was taken on notice by the individual, and the answer that was returned is a non-answer. You're saying that that's consistent with the transparency standards that you want to apply at the University of Wollongong?

**MAX LU:** Let me make another statement about the distinction between the subsidiary company and the University of Wollongong parent. We don't have control over the employment of a company, although we are owner of that company. But when I say I'm committed to—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You have access to the information. You're able to return an answer honestly on notice—

**MAX LU:** I don't have access to the information.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** —but chose not to return a complete answer.

**MAX LU:** If I did—

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You've signed it off.

**MAX LU:** With respect, if I did have access to the information, I would have returned a number.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** You could have asked for the information.

**MAX LU:** We did ask.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** And they didn't provide the answer?

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**CORRECTED**

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**MAX LU:** That's correct.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** They refused to reply to a request for information from the university? Is that what you're putting on the record?

**MAX LU:** There was the explanation why they couldn't give the exact salary.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** There was an explanation as to why they couldn't answer, truthfully, a parliamentary Committee requiring an answer to a question.

**MAX LU:** Again, I'd like to emphasise the matters relating to the CEO's employment are strictly subject to the remuneration committee of the board of the Global Enterprises.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Those kind of confidentiality arrangements don't apply to questions asked when someone takes an oath to give an answer honestly before a parliamentary Committee. You understand that, don't you, Professor Lu?

**MAX LU:** I do, but I wasn't here when she gave that commitment.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** No, but you did sign off on the answer.

**MAX LU:** I signed off on the answer based on the advice I was given. There's a reason, because of confidentiality, they couldn't provide the number.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Are you happy to take on notice the question that was asked and return an honest answer?

**MAX LU:** Yes, I will take it on notice.

**The Hon. ANTHONY D'ADAM:** Can I ask the representative from UTS, Professor Readman, in the hearing where we had Professor Andrew Parfitt before the same committee—the social issues committee inquiry—there was a series of questions asked by Ms Mitchell about courses that Professor Parfitt described as being temporarily suspended. Could you perhaps provide us an update on the status of those courses?

**KYLIE READMAN:** There were a number of courses that were temporarily suspended so that the university could review whether or not they should continue to be offered at the university. That was part of a broader course and subject alignment process that was happening as part of operational sustainability. Those courses were temporarily suspended to provide assurance to future students and potential students, through the UAC and other processes, with clarity about what we would and wouldn't offer at the time.

Since the decisions have been made and the academic change implementation plan has been released, which is in February of this year, as a result of the feedback that we received, a number of those courses will not be discontinued. In fact, some of the temporary suspensions have already been lifted to enable students to come into those courses. I particularly call out the Graduate Certificate in Diabetes Education, which has already gone back on offer, and the Master of Palliative Care, which is going to be offered from mid-year. Those groups have gone through a process of reviewing their offer, and we are supporting that. There are still some to come and those are to do with education, which are intended to be relaunched in 2027, and then some other aspects of postgraduate public health. They're still to come through the committee process from the faculties involved.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Professor Readman, would you mind providing on notice the numbers? There was a global number that was suspended. If you could now give us the contrast as to how many have been reinstated, I'd appreciate that.

**KYLIE READMAN:** Sure.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Could I ask to all of the representatives here today—and I don't know if you'll have the information at hand but, if anyone does, I'd appreciate it. Otherwise, you could take it on notice. How much did each of your universities spend on the commissions to authorised education agents, let's say in the past two years—2024-25. I don't know if anyone has got that information to hand now. No, I wouldn't have thought so.

**MARK SCOTT:** I'll take it on notice.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Could I also ask, while you're in that zone—and I suspect this will be on notice as well—would you mind also letting us know how much money, if any, was spent on agent familiarisation visits, either in New South Wales or retreats held anywhere else, if that's possible? In the past two years would be fine as well, if that's okay. Again, I presume you won't have that here.

**MARK SCOTT:** I'll take it on notice.

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**CORRECTED**

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**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** This might be one that you might be able to just provide a quick answer to. We asked you about Nous before. I wondered if any of your universities were engaging with Pilbara Group consultants, if you could let me know that. Professor Carlin, you're shaking your head.

**TYRONE CARLIN:** We don't.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** You don't engage with the Pilbara Group?

**TYRONE CARLIN:** Not to my knowledge.

**MAX LU:** Not to my knowledge.

**MARK SCOTT:** Not as far as I'm aware.

**VLADO PERKOVIC:** Not aware of it.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** Anyone else?

**KYLIE READMAN:** It's not a name I'm familiar with, but I'm happy to have a look at it and come back to the Committee.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS:** Same.

**The Hon. Dr SARAH KAINE:** That's interesting because I think a number of you appear on their website as clients. It might be a historical thing: "We once worked with you." If you wouldn't mind having a look and, again, let's take the last two years. If you have done so, if you wouldn't mind letting me know the details of that as well. I might just go back to Ms Readman, if I may. One of the issues that I think was facing UTS recently was a report about sexual violence on campus. I think there was a National Student Ombudsman that undertook a report. I think there were some fairly disturbing outcomes in that report relating to what had occurred and what should happen. Could you please give an update? I'm hoping progress might have been made on the issues.

**KYLIE READMAN:** Sure. We have been engaging with the NSO on a couple of items that relate to sexual harm. The report that they are finalising is under embargo at the moment, so I can't speak to the detail. What I can say specifically around our approach to gender-based violence, both before the preparation for the implementation of the national code and since, is that we have undertaken a huge piece of work, particularly accelerating since July last year, where we established a program team to prepare us. We had done some previous review work with an independent person who'd given us some suggestions and some recommendations about how we could proceed. We wrapped those recommendations into the work to prepare for the national code. Almost all of those recommendations are complete, except for the finalisation of the student rules, which will go to the council meeting. It's planned to go to the council meeting for approval in April 2026. So massive progress has been made. I'm actually quite proud of the work that we've done since we initiated it in July last year.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. That does take us to time. That's all we've got time for today. To the extent that there were questions taken on notice or that there will be supplementary questions, the Committee secretariat will be in touch. A sincere thank you for making yourselves available again for us today. As this is the last day of budget estimates, and certainly the last day for this particular Committee, I'd also like to thank Hansard, our audio and tech people and, of course, the wonderful Committee secretariat.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee proceeded to deliberate.**