

The Estimates Committee convened at 9 am.

MINISTER HERSEY'S PORTFOLIOS

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Good morning. Welcome to today's Estimates Committee hearings. I welcome you, minister, to today's hearings and invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you.

Mrs HERSEY: Good morning, Chair. I introduce Acting CE, Aderyn Chatterton; Deputy CE, Paul van Holsteyn; Deputy CE Tony Considine; and Jasmin Aldenhoven, Chief Financial Officer.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Minister, I invite you to make a brief opening statement of no more than 20 minutes. I will then call for questions relating to the statement. The committee will then consider any whole-of-government and fiscal strategy related questions before moving on to output-specific questions.

Mrs HERSEY: I am pleased to appear before the committee today to discuss the 2026–27 budget for the Department of Education and Training and our government's continued investment in the future of the Northern Territory.

This budget delivers a record investment of \$1.73bn across education, training and early childhood services, reflecting our government's commitment to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore our unique Territory lifestyle, creating opportunities for Territorians at every stage of life.

The department's 2026–27 budget represents an increase of \$65.3m compared with the revised 2025–26 budget. This growth is driven largely by additional Northern Territory and Commonwealth funding through Better and Fairer Schools Agreement and the extension of the Preschool Reform Agreement through to June 2028.

Our investment spans the full education continuum. This includes \$30.6m for early childhood education and care services, \$1.3bn for government schools, \$351.9m for non-government schools, \$120.8m for training and higher ed and \$93.3m for corporate and shared services.

We are also investing \$192.9m in education infrastructure to ensure our students and educators have access for modern, fit-for-purpose learning environments. This includes the landmark \$110m Palmerston secondary special education school, \$9.5m for secondary reform capacity upgrades at Rosebery and Driver Secondary Schools and \$3.5m for upgrades at Alekarenge School.

Our government's education agenda is focused on delivering our key priorities of reforming secondary education, creating pathways to real jobs, improving access to quality early childhood programs, boosting literacy and numeracy outcomes, increasing school attendance and engagement and attracting and retaining a high-quality teaching workforce.

The major focus of this budget is the continued implementation of our secondary reform program. We know that rebuilding the Territory economy starts with ensuring young people leave school with the skills, qualifications and confidence they need to succeed. The reforms under way are designed to ensure every Territory student can complete school and transition successfully into further education, training or employment.

The reforms are creating clear pathways for students to complete the Northern Territory NTCET while developing strong literacy and numeracy and work-readiness skills. Across urban centres we are delivering on our commitment to transition from the middle school model to a comprehensive structure Year 7 to 12. At the start of 2026 school year Dripstone, Nightcliff, Sanderson, Rosebery and Driver schools have commenced operating as comprehensive secondary schools whilst Darwin Middle and Darwin High Schools have merged to form a comprehensive high school as well.

In Alice Springs, Centralian Middle School and Centralian Senior College will become Alice Springs College from Term 1 2027.

These reforms are designed to improve attendance, retention, increase senior secondary completions and better rely on education pathways, with the Territory's workforce and industry priorities.

Supporting these reforms is a \$12.5m investment in school infrastructure upgrades, ensuring schools have the facilities required to deliver a full secondary curriculum. This budget also includes a transformational investment in specialist education through the approval of a new \$110m Palmerston secondary special education school located adjacent to Rosebery Secondary School.

The purpose-built facility will cater for up to 200 students from years seven to 12 and will provide modern inclusive learning environments that meet growing demand for specialist education services. Construction is expected to be completed in late 2028 with the school opening in term one 2029. That tender went out last week. I look forward to following that build with those students attending in term one 2029.

The design has seen strong community consultation and proposed features include a hydrotherapy pool, multipurpose hall, sensory-friendly VET buildings with a mini-Woolworths, kitchen and café, arts and design studios and music room. These will enable students to a Certificate I and II in retail, horticulture and business. These courses will create pathways to real jobs which remains another priority of our CLP government.

The budget also invests \$120.4m in vocational education and training to ensure Territorians have access to the skills needed for the jobs of the future. Through partnerships with CDU and Batchelor Institute, we continue to align training delivery with the Territory's priority industries including defence, gas and mining, tourism and agriculture.

A significant initiative in this area is the Katherine Trades Training Centre. Following Australian Government approval in February this year, the centre will be established between Katherine High School and MacFarlane Primary School. This project brings together investment from the Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government and CDU and will provide students and the local community with access to modern trade training facilities and strong pathways into employment.

The soon-to-be-released Skills NT Plan 2026–28 will further strengthen these efforts by connecting Territorians to real jobs through earlier and clearer school-to-work pathways, upskilling opportunities and stronger alignment between training and industry demand.

Our CLP Finocchiaro government is equally committed to ensuring Territory children have the strongest possible start in life. In December 2025, we launched the Early Childhood Safe Start, Strong Futures Plan. The plan provides a comprehensive framework to strengthen quality, safety and accountability across the early childhood sector and it aligns with national reforms arising from the National Child Safety Review.

The plan is built around four pillars—accountability, investment, continuous improvement and engagement. Together these reforms will help deliver high quality services and better outcomes for children and families. Improving student achievement remains fundamental to our education agenda. The budget includes \$13.7m to continue implementation of the boost in literacy and numeracy plan. This initiative is strengthening foundation reading and mathematics skills through evidence-based teaching practices, improved assessment tools and enhanced curriculum support across all government schools.

Strong literacy and numeracy skills are essential for future employment, lifelong learning and participating in society. This investment ensures students receive the support they need as early as possible. Improving attendance is another critical priority. The department continues to work intensively with families, schools and communities to support students who have become disengaged from education. Additional support has been secured through the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment Framework to strengthen engagement for remote students and those on the intensive support roll.

Attendance teams, student engagement advisers and schools are working together to reconnect students with learning through tailored support, case management and, where necessary, compliance measures. I have set a target to reduce the intensive support role by 800 students by the end of 2026 school year. Every child has the right to an education and every parent has a responsibility to ensure their child attends school. Attracting and retaining quality teachers is equally important.

This budget provides \$14.6m to strengthen teacher attraction and retention initiatives. We are increasing permanent employment opportunities, reducing short-term contracts and moving teachers on to permanency and building teacher capability and supporting workforce wellbeing across the Territory.

As at March 2026 almost 70% of classroom teachers and more than two-thirds of Aboriginal team teachers were employed permanently through scholarship programs, strategic partnerships and initiatives such as the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education Program—RATE program—we are continuing to build a strong local workforce.

In April this year the government launched the Respect and Responsibility in Schools Framework, which establishes clear expectations for behaviour across all government schools. The message is simple: violence, aggression and abuse will not be tolerated, and every school must have a safe and respectful place for students and staff.

The budget also delivers on our commitment to regional and remote communities through a \$3.5m investment at Alekarengge School. This project will replace the administration building and improve the early learning centre, creating safer, more welcoming and culturally responsive learning environments that strengthen engagement with families and improve outcomes for remote communities.

We are also reinforcing the importance of civics and citizenship education. Earlier this year a new policy was introduced requiring the National Anthem to be played and sung at school assemblies and special events. Students will continue to learn about national symbols, citizenship and Australian identity through the Australian curriculum, bringing back a sense of pride. We also have students learning about Territory Day—which is coming up—and what self-government means.

Importantly, we are beginning to see encouraging results from our educational reforms. In 2025, the Northern Territory recorded 1,608 senior secondary certificate completions across government and non-government schools. An increase of 84 completions compared with the previous year. These improvements reflect the efforts of students, teachers, families and schools, and provide confidence that our reforms are moving in the right direction.

Our government also remains focused on reducing cost of living pressures for Territory families. With the swimming in schools program now a permanent initiative providing free swimming and water safety lessons all year one to six students across government and non-government schools. In 2025 almost 18,000 students participated across 160 schools gaining essential lifesaving skills whilst providing real cost of living relief for Territory families.

We have also strengthened the Back-to-School payment scheme by expanding eligibility, extending access periods and increasing flexibility for families and schools.

I acknowledge the department's significant contribution to emergency management over the past year. During Tropical Cyclone Fina, subsequent flooding and Cyclone Narelle events, the department activated emergency shelters across all regions of the Territory, supporting more than 2,300 community members and deploying over 500 staff despite widespread disruptions and temporary school closures. The department established alternative learning arrangements and pop-up schools to minimise impacts on students and communities. These efforts demonstrate the critical role Education staff play not only in supporting learning; but also in supporting Territorians during times of need across the width and breadth of the Territory.

This budget reflects a government focused on delivering better educational outcomes, stronger pathways to employment, safer schools, improved attendance and a workforce equipped for the future. It is an investment in Territory children, families and the Territory's long-term prosperity. I look forward to answering the committee's questions.

Mr ACTING CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I will begin by reading the rest of the script, which I forgot to read at the beginning.

I will invite the shadow ministers to ask their questions first, followed by committee members and, finally, all participating members can ask questions. The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by a shadow minister, rather than waiting for the end of the shadow minister's questioning on the output.

Are there any questions relating to the statement?

Mr BROWN: Thank you, Chair. Welcome, staff and Minister.

How much funding has been allocated to the truancy program in the 2026–27 financial year?

Mrs HERSEY: The budget for increasing school attendance is \$12.340m.

Mr BROWN: And that is—so school attendance is the truancy program? It is...

Mrs HERSEY: Yes, increasing school attendance.

J DAVIS: I have a follow-up. Thank you, Chair. Good morning, minister.

Can you outline what that \$12.340m figure covers?

Mrs HERSEY: Increasing school attendance. We have engagement officers and attendance officers, and they work across the Territory, engaging with families. I have been on patrols with them. We also have counsellors in schools. We have allied health professionals and psychologists all making sure that the children who are disengaged and have not been to school for 20 days or more are receiving all the support they need to make their transition into the classroom possible.

J DAVIS: Sorry; my question was not clear. I am interested in a breakdown of the detail of what you just outlined.

Mrs HERSEY: The breakdown of the \$12.340m?

J DAVIS: Yes.

Mr PAECH: Are you after how much is staff in the truancy program broken down?

J DAVIS: Yes, for all the positions that were outlined and any administration costs as part of that budget.

Mrs HERSEY: We have that information, but it is not here with us today. I can take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.1

Mr CHAIR: Member for Johnston, please restate the question for the record.

J DAVIS: Could you provide a breakdown of the budget for the school attendance officer program with all staffing costs, administration costs et cetera?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.1.

Mr BROWN: How many compliance notices were issued during the reporting period?

Mrs HERSEY: There have been many compliance visits and compliance notices. Are you wanting the number in total of compliance ...

Mr BROWN: Yes, the compliance notices that were issued.

Mrs HERSEY: The total number of notices that we have overall across all the regions is 1,395. That includes compulsory conferences, directions to enrol, attendance with the parents and attendance with independent children, because some compliance notices go to independent children. Across all the regions that is the total.

Mr BROWN: Can I get a breakdown of the regions? Is that possible?

Mrs HERSEY: In Barkly there has been 224; Big Rivers, 382; Central, 288; Darwin, 131; East Arnhem, 91, and Top End, 279.

Mr BROWN: How many fines have been issued for the whole year?

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Mr Chair! Can I ask a follow-up question regarding the reporting?

Mr CHAIR: Yes, Member for Gwoja. I will let the minister answer this question and then we will go to your follow on.

Mrs HERSEY: Sorry; was there a question?

Mr CHAIR: Yes. The Member for Arafura will restate the question.

Mr BROWN: How many fines have been issued for the whole year?

Mrs HERSEY: The total number of fines for the whole year is 61. In case you want a follow-up, four were revoked.

Mr BROWN: How many of those fines have been issued to non-Aboriginal parents?

Mrs HERSEY: We do not record whether the fines were Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal; they are all Australians and parents who do not have their children on the intensive support role. This is not a race-based thing, if that maybe is what you may be insinuating. If your child does not go to school for 20 days or more, no matter who you are or where you are from, you will get a compliance visit or notice, and if you do not comply you will get a fine.

Mr BROWN: If we cannot have the data, what about remote locations compared to urban locations?

Mrs HERSEY: Seven in the Barkly region, six in Big Rivers, 35 in Central Australia, eight in Darwin and five in the Top End.

Mr PAECH: I want to go back to compliance notices. How many notices have not actually been upheld during the reporting period? To confirm, you said that 1,395 was the number of compliance notices issued; how many compliance notices were upheld during that reporting period?

Mrs HERSEY: Out of the 1,395, 681 compliance notices were revoked or withdrawn, which is 492 more than the 189 revoked and withdrawn notices in 2024.

Mr BROWN: How many fines have been revoked?

Mrs HERSEY: There were 33 infringement notices revoked or withdrawn in 2025, which was 31 more than the two revoked and withdrawn in 2024.

Mr BROWN: How many fines have been issued to students living independently?

Mrs HERSEY: There were three in the Top End for an independent child in Term 1 this year.

J DAVIS: When a fine is issued to a child living independently, could you step us through what happens?

Ms CHATTERTON: It is the same process as anyone else. There is a range of engagement activities that occur before we activate the compliance elements. The infringement notice is delivered to the individual, in this case it is an independent student, per their enrolment details. It is a lesser infringement amount. The Department of Education provides the infringement on to the Fines Recovery Unit, which takes care of the follow-up compliance of the payment of the fine.

J DAVIS: They chase for payment, when you say they take care of the follow-up?

Ms CHATTERTON: Yes.

J DAVIS: What is the amount for an independent student?

Ms CHATTERTON: Ten per cent of the adult fine. The adult fine is \$378, so \$37.80.

J DAVIS: If a child is in the care of the government and they are not attending, is a fine issued to the government?

Ms CHATTERTON: The fine is issued to the person listed as the parent/caregiver on the enrolment form and that is who the fine issued to.

J DAVIS: If a child is in care through the minister, who would the fine be issued to?

Mrs HERSEY: I think, as the Acting CE has just said, it is the parent who is on the enrolment form. Whoever that parent is, or if a child is in care—I am not sure if you want to talk more to that.

It would be the carer. If the carer is nominated on the enrolment form then it would be to them but it would be to the parent if it is the parent on the enrolment form.

J DAVIS: And if the minister has parental responsibility?

Mrs HERSEY: If they are under the government it is the carer. If that is what you are trying to get at.

Mr PAECH: If the Chief Executive of Territory Families is the legal guardian for a child, would they receive the fine if they are being fined for non-school attendance?

Mrs HERSEY: I hope that if the Chief Executive of Territory Families is the legal guardian, that child would be going to school. Again, it is whoever is on the enrolment form. I think you would have to have a case if you wanted to do that. We do not have any cases specifically to answer that question. It is the person who is on the enrolment form.

Mr PAECH: Yes, but there would be some leniency. I am hoping that if the school had not had those details updated—because the child may have been on a passive role or something, to interrogate who the actual guardian is at the time.

Mrs HERSEY: If that was the case then we would have conversations with the Department of Children and Families around that in answer to your question.

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Mr BROWN: Minister, you have stated the fine is around \$378, is it?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes, \$378.

Mr BROWN: Do you have the total amount of fines collected?

Mrs HERSEY: We do not have that information and that potentially a question for the Fines Recovery Unit which would be ...

Mr PAECH: AGD.

Mr CHAIR: Yes, thank you, Member for Gwoja.

Mr PAECH: You are welcome. Young students are potentially being referred to debt collectors because the department is issuing a notification so therefore, potentially students are ending up before debt collection.

Mrs HERSEY: Member for Gwoja, if we are talking about independent children, there are only three who have been issued a fine. That would be through the Attorney-General, as you stated, and the Fines Recovery Unit, so that might be a question for her.

Of those three, two of them were revoked.

Mr BROWN: How many of these have been paid? Two have been revoked. Has the last one been paid?

Mrs HERSEY: Again, that is managed by Fines Recovery. We do not have that information.

Mr PAECH: We are talking about truancy. You have spoken a lot about kids who do not attend school and that parents are income managed. How many Territorians are actively income managed because of truancy?

Mrs HERSEY: There were 61 referrals; 36 of those were accepted and 25 families were not income managed.

Mr PAECH: Just to be clear, there are 36 families who are now actively income managed.

Mrs HERSEY: Correct.

Mr PAECH: Do you have a breakdown of whether those families are urban or remote families?

Mrs HERSEY: We do not have it by region.

Mr PAECH: Do you collect it or not?

Mrs HERSEY: We do collect it by region; we just do not have that information here.

Mr PAECH: Would you be prepared to take that on notice?

Mrs HERSEY: Sure.

Question on Notice No 7.2

Mr CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: Can you provide the breakdown per region of families who have been issued with an income management notice?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.2.

J DAVIS: What evidence base is there that fining parents or referring them to welfare increases school attendance?

Mrs HERSEY: This was an election commitment. We said that we would increase attendance and accountability in schools.

It is great that there have been so many questions on attendance. I note that you were not part of the government, but the previous government had a secret list, which is where all these children were. There were 1,600 of them when we came to government.

We have made a conscious effort of getting attendance officers and engagement officers out there, working hard with families, Housing, Children and Families, and engaging these families. At the end of the day, it is not about fining people, but at some point there needs to be—it is a bit like a carrot-and-stick approach—support along the way, which is what the compliance notices do if families are not complying.

You have to remember, Member for Johnston, it is against the law not to send your child to school. These children on the intensive support roll have not been to school for 20 days or more. These children and their families, if they do not go to school for 20 days or more, are issued with a compliance notice. If they do not comply within a set amount of time, they will get a fine.

As I have already stated, many fines have been revoked, and people have been referred to income management. At the end of the day, as the minister for Education I want as many children in school as possible because we want to get these kids into jobs and be productive members of our community, helping rebuild our economy. This is about making sure that children are educated and that people are doing the right thing and sending their children to school.

J DAVIS: I understand the intent. My question was what evidence is there that this is increasing attendance at school?

Mrs HERSEY: Again, when these children go back to school, there are flexible learning centres, special areas in schools set aside for children who are coming back off the intensive support after they have not been to school or 20 days or more. They are put in an area with a staff member who supports them, helps them with their learning journey, not just sitting there and doing a worksheet or something.

I will hand over to Acting Chief Executive to add a little to that.

J DAVIS: Just so my question is clear, I am not asking for the rationale for the program or an explanation of what you are doing, I am asking what evidence are you basing this program on that fining parents and sometimes children or referring people to Welfare increases school attendance? What is the evidence base for that?

Mrs HERSEY: Within those 37 families, there are 45 NT Government school students who are in that cohort whose parents and caregivers, as I said, are being supported to ensure that those children attend school. If you want some evidence, we want children to come into a school and make sure that they get an education that they deserve so they can become lifelong learners and be productive members of society.

J DAVIS: Everybody wants that but, with all due respect, wanting that is not the evidence that this is based on. Is there any evidence that this approach is based on?

Mrs HERSEY: I love the fact that you said 'with due respect' because clearly you disagree with me. That is okay because we can agree to disagree. The fact is this was an election commitment. Whether there is evidence or not, what I want to see is the evidence of these children coming back into the schoolroom and becoming lifelong learners.

This has been going for 18 months so far. We reassess this each week when I have a conversation with the department. There are also many families that are worked with through Territory Families, Housing, the attendance officers and engagement officers, as well as Aboriginal organisations. There is a lot of support around these people.

We are upholding the law because it is against the law to not send your child to school.

Mr MACKAY: When the fines are revoked—a fine has been issued to a caregiver or a young person who is independent and has been revoked—is there a breakdown of why it has been revoked; whether it is because there is now compliance or any other issues? Why would a fine be revoked?

Mrs HERSEY: When the fine is revoked that means that child has gone back to school and is engaged in the curriculum and school.

Mr MACKAY: What percentage of fines have been revoked?

Mrs HERSEY: I just said that before. There were five fines, and two were revoked in Term 1 this year.

Mr BROWN: How many Territory students are enrolled in schools across the Northern Territory? Of those students, how many attend school? Of those, how many are non-Aboriginal?

Mrs HERSEY: The enrolment at all schools—is that what you wanted?

Mr BROWN: Yes, across the Territory.

Mrs HERSEY: The enrolment at all NT schools is 43,350. Aboriginal enrolment was 16,923, and non-Aboriginal enrolment was 26,427. That is for all schools—non-government and government.

Mr CHAIR: Just going back to the school attendance program, I am interested in my electorate of Drysdale with the four schools. I am curious regarding the increase. We are getting students back in the classroom, especially those who have been absent for a long time. What does the department have in place to assist those students and particularly assist the teaching staff when it comes to integrating a child who has been absent from the classroom for a long time?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: There is a significant range of ways that schools support attendance. Most schools would have a wellbeing and attendance team which would have identified staff that provide support for students to attend and to reengage with school. In addition to that, there is a range of flexible education programs. Sometimes that is a distinct program within a school or sometimes that might be additional support that is provided to students coming in using support staff who may be in the school.

In terms of the department support to those initiatives, we have our attendance team. The minister provided an overview of some of the work of that team previously. That team is designed to work to support the engagement of young people. That is its primary focus.

We also have support such as through our student wellbeing inclusion program services team which provides support, for instance, for students who may have additional needs. We also have counsellors across different schools as well.

Mr CHAIR: The compliance team brings a child to the school. What is the process then, at the front office, if we have a child who needs a uniform, shoes and that kind of thing? How does that process occur between staff bringing the child in and then the teaching staff at the school?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: Our attendance team works intensively with those families, particularly where students are most disengaged. There would be previous meetings prior to the family coming in to the school. That is the attendance team working with the school and understanding the needs of young people who may not be engaged in school—working with the school leadership team and/or identified staff, as I said—so attendance teams within the school provide that support. Usually there would then be a meeting which involves the attendance team, school staff and family—in terms of a conference—to identify how we can best support that young person to return into school. Actions then come out of that planning meeting in terms of what the support will look like.

Most schools have a range of strategies to support around those barriers such as uniforms or footwear. The government also has the \$200 Back-to-School voucher, which this year, we have extended the duration that can be used; if a student is not attending in Term 1, they can access the voucher in term two. We changed that this year to provide support around those essentials in terms of coming back to school.

Mr CHAIR: Once we hit the—I am getting specific, because, to lay the picture for the department, in Drysdale we at times have a large transient population coming in and out of the electorate. This means we have children who might be based, usually, at a school in regional or remote NT who are coming in—they might be in for the Dry Season and then attending Gray or Driver primary school. Is there anything to then assist? Does that child then go into a normal class, or is there a supported classroom?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: There are a range of supports. For instance, at Gray and Driver they have different support staff across the school who are utilised to best support the range of needs, particularly young people that may be joining the school, who have not previously attended that school. It is about planning for the student. Often it involves engaging them in a class with support; that is also the quickest pathway for that young person to resume and return to that learning program.

Mr BROWN: Minister, what is the attendance rate for some of the outer regions of Term 1 in 2026? Is that up or down compared with the same term last year? What is the attendance rate compared between Barkly, Big Rivers, Central Australia, Darwin and Top End?

Mrs HERSEY: This is 2020 in the period of tracking information: Barkly has 43.9%; Big Rivers, 56.5%; Central Australia, 63.5%; Darwin, 83.8%—sorry, I can give you the Term 1 for 2026. I was looking for that. I will start again. Term 1 2026: Barkly region, 41.7%; Big Rivers region, 59.8%; Central region, 63.4%; Darwin region, 85.6%; East Arnhem region, 57.5%; and Top End region, 77.7%.

Mr BROWN: I believe you have answered this ...

Mrs HERSEY: I also have a breakdown of schools by electorate, so if you want to know the figures of your electorate of Arafura, where there are eight government schools—including Gunbalanya, Jabiru, Maningrida College, Milikapiti, Mamaruni, Pularumpi and Waruwi—I have an attendance figure for them.

I would like to more broadly say that it is great that we are having such a focus on attendance—I wish your government did as well when you were in for eight years—but it is all everyone's conversation as the member to be talking about school attendance when you are engaging with your schools.

It does not matter whether I see families out, if they are not at school during school times, I speak to them and ask where they are from. A lot of people come into Katherine from out bush, and I talk to them about the importance of school. In Alice Springs there is a KITES program and if remote families are in town for a while, they can access that school.

All members of parliament have a responsibility to talk about how important attendance is and the fact that it is illegal not to send your child to school or withhold them from education. Education and attendance is everyone's responsibility.

Mr BROWN: Has attendance gone up or down from 2025–26?

Mrs HERSEY: Non-Aboriginal enrolment has gone up and Aboriginal enrolment has come down. The non-Aboriginal enrolment at non-government schools has ...

Ms UIBO: The member asked for the attendance not enrolments. Based on that last question, you have not answered the second half about the attendance rates for Term 1 of 2025 compared with the figures you just provided for Term 1 of 2026. Has it decreased or increased per region?

Mrs HERSEY: In Term 1 the average attendance across all regions has gone down, which is why we are so focused on getting kids back to school. I bring to everyone's attention that across Term 1 we had seven extreme weather events across the Territory. In the Member for Arnhem's electorate there were extreme weather events; there was flooding where kids came into Mataranka, Beswick and Jilkminggan as well as many other areas across the Territory. That skewed the attendance figures. Even though there were pop-up schools across the flooded regions and for people coming into shelters, that attendance is skewed over Term 1. I look forward to seeing that data over Term 2 and the rest of the year.

Mr BROWN: How many pop-up schools were there over the first half of the year?

Mrs HERSEY: There were pop-up schools at Nightcliff High, Moulden, Batchelor Area School, Adelaide River School, Alekarenge School, Katherine School of the Air, Clyde Fenton Primary School, Katherine South Primary School, Wugularr School, Mataranka School, Yirrkala, Laynhapuy Homelands, Dawurr boarding school and at CDU.

J DAVIS: Sorry, I am not sure if you covered this in answer to the question about attendance rates—you gave detail about the first part of this year; can you give attendance rates for the reporting period last year? Have they gone up or down?

Mrs HERSEY: I already read out the 2025 rates before.

J DAVIS: The broad question is: did rates go up or down last year? Apologies if you have already answered it and I missed it.

Mrs HERSEY: For NT-wide there was a 0.6% decrease.

J DAVIS: So that I am clear, does that include the period that we are talking about where there was significant weather affected attendance?

Mrs HERSEY: Term 4 last year would have but the majority of that was this year, but Term 4 last year was affected with the cyclone.

J DAVIS: Is that drop over the whole reporting period?

Mrs HERSEY: That 0.6% was over that reporting period in 2025, and I gave the 2026 data before.

Mr BROWN: Can you explain why the attendance rate for Aboriginal children early education has decreased from Term 1 in 2025 compared to Term 1 in 2026 in every region?

Mrs HERSEY: The total preschool student enrolments—did you want the number?

Mr BROWN: Yes—the decrease from Term 1, 2025 to Term 1, 2026.

Mrs HERSEY: The other thing is that in early childcare services sometimes those children might be going to preschool because they can either be going to preschool or some of the early childcare centres offer preschool. They were not met by 54 in the preschool enrolments. Aboriginal preschool student enrolments were not met by 55, and the preschool attendance rated—did you want the enrolments or the attendance?

Mr BROWN: Yes, attendance as well.

Mrs HERSEY: The preschool attendance rate for non-Aboriginal students was 87%, which was not met by 1%, and 51% for Aboriginal students, but it is not compulsory to go to early childhood—it is not compulsory until you are going to school, so Transition. There could be a number of reasons that those numbers have dropped, but that is why we also have brought out Boosting Literacy and Numeracy and our Safe Start,

Strong Futures Plan to make sure we engage better. There is a number of programs for early childcare students. There are FaFT programs that are run in Aboriginal communities, as well as in some town centres.

Ms UIBO: You were saying 'not met' and you gave a figure—for example, not met by 54. Are you talking about a target of numbers that are not being met, or are you talking percentage? What does it mean when you say 'not met by 54' and 'not met by X number'?

Mrs HERSEY: There are key performance indicators for getting those children into early childhood. There are set targets in Budget Paper No 3, where those children are to get into services. We know that children who go to early childcare settings are more equipped for school and are more socialised when they get to school. We want to make sure that as many kids as possible do get into early childhood education and care services, but it is not a compulsory requirement.

Ms UIBO: When you were using the words 'not met by 54'—that is just a number that I remember you said—what is the global target? What is the percentage that is not being met?

Mrs HERSEY: The target in the total preschool student enrolments was 2,800, and it was not met by 54, which is 1.9%.

Mr BROWN: With attendance going backwards across the board, why are you wasting money on the truancy program?

Mrs HERSEY: That may be your opinion, Member for Arafura, but attendance is extremely important.

As I stated before, it was an election commitment. We will continue to work and put all measures out there to make sure that we get kids to school. We have attendance officers and engagement officers. They are working with families across communities in the Territory. They are working with Territory Housing and Children and Families. Paul spoke before about the engagement those children get when they come back into school. We also know that once they get into school, there are counsellors. We have Aboriginal liaison officers, school-based constables and many people to support those children if they need someone to talk to in a school environment.

It was an election commitment. We will continue working extremely hard. We want to make sure that intensive support roll is 800 less by the end of this year. As the minister, I have high expectations. We have set high targets to ensure we have the department working and doing the job every day to ensure that every child can get into school and be educated to be lifelong learners, contribute to society and get a job in the future.

J DAVIS: Is the program being independently evaluated?

Mrs HERSEY: The program, is that as in the intensive support program, the attendance officers, the engagement officers ...

J DAVIS: In relation to the question about what the impact of this program has been so far, is there an independent evaluation of it?

Mrs HERSEY: The evaluation happens weekly by the department, where it is monitored. That program is about them getting out and engaging with those students and making sure that they—as I said many times—come back into school. Is it independently evaluated by somebody outside of the department? No, it is not. This is an educational matter. It was an election commitment. We will hold fast on making sure that we get as many children into school.

As I said before, it is against the law to withhold your child from going to school. I am sure your children went to school, as my children did. There are many contributing factors why some of these children do not go to school. That is the job of the attendance officer, the engagement officer and the counsellor—everyone who works with that young person to support them in making sure their needs and family's needs are best met in the circumstances to try to get those young people into school.

J DAVIS: If it is not based on evidence and not being evaluated, how do you know it is working? If the data we have of attendance is going down, there has been significant investment, there are wonderful things happening which you outlined in terms of the support in schools, but the attendance rate is still going down, how do Territorians know that this money is working to support kids to be in school?

Mrs HERSEY: As I said, the evaluation is ongoing. I also outlined considerably in Term 1 and Term 4 last year that we had seven extreme weather events that had a lot of disruption across school communities. That has added to young people on the intensive support roll by not being at school. Even though we had pop-up schools out there, the department has engaged with families and done many things.

It is a matter of still going out and doing that work and making sure that families understand that it is against the law. We are upholding the law. It is not new, it is just that the previous government was not too concerned about it. It is against the law to not send your child to school. That is the end of it.

As a government coming in, it was one of our commitments. We said attendance was front and centre and we would make sure that children got to school. I have no apologies for that.

J DAVIS: My question is not about whether children should be at school, it is about whether or not this program is working. If there is no evidence it is based on and there is no evaluation of it, how do you know it is working?

Mrs HERSEY: Chair, I have answered that in many different ways and variations. It may be that it does not agree or sit with the Member for Johnston, but I answered the question.

Mr CHAIR: Yes, I will come in with a question. The following two questions are specifically related to teachers. One is the increasing administration burden on teachers. Minister, if you want to answer this in an output group, please let me know. Apologies, I am not sure if you covered it in your opening statement.

Focusing purely on the teaching staff and the administration burden and, I guess, the administration creep that is seen across the profession across the country, is there anything the department is currently doing to help alleviate the administration burden on our frontline teaching staff?

Mrs HERSEY: There are a couple of major initiatives to reduce workload, including remote school shared services model in the Top End region and the end-to-end recruitment model. There are four centralised positions of literacy coach, secondary provision coach, student wellbeing and inclusion teacher as well as executive support which remote schools can access, so they do not have to individually have those people in their schools. There is also an attraction and recruitment team so that schools do not have to do that.

As well as some of the other measures to take the pressure off schools, they can also ...

Mr CHAIR: I know that administration in the classroom is broad, so I am happy to take this on notice if it allows the department to look at all the different forms of administrative pressures on teachers to provide a— it is up to you, though, minister.

Mrs HERSEY: If you want more of an answer, I can give you that.

Mr CHAIR: I am happy to take that on notice.

Could you please provide an update on any action the department is doing to ease the administrative burden on frontline teaching staff? Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.3.

Mrs HERSEY: Excuse me, Chair, if you would like, Deputy CE Paul van Holsteyn can give you some more fulsome information, unless you would like it in a written brief.

Mr CHAIR: I am happy for a written brief, but if Mr van Holsteyn could provide an update, thank you.

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: Reducing administrative burden is an interesting topic because there are concrete things that we do, new technologies that we introduce or new ways of approaching our work.

The minister identified, for instance, the end-to-end recruitment model. Recruitment is a really onerous part of staffing our schools, for our principals, for instance. We have significantly increased the support to take the administrative work off the principals so that the principal can just do the work to determine whether the teacher has the expertise to keep driving outcomes for Territory kids. That is an example that the minister cited.

For teachers, for instance, there is a product. We have introduced an online excursion form to support our swimming program. Excursion paperwork in the past has been incredibly onerous. By looking at the new technology that is available, it is already linked to our student administration management system so that the names are prepopulated. We have the details. It is streamlined and has considerably changed how we approach the swimming excursions. We did that to support the government's commitment to have free swimming lessons from Year 1 to Year 6 across our primary schools. We are looking at extending that to be across all excursion categories. There is a range of really concrete things that we can point to regarding reducing administrative burden.

The other part of it is that in all of our decision-making, we are approaching this work with what we call a workload aware framework. It is real that there are administrative tasks that teachers, principals and schools need to achieve. It is part of all our worlds.

For instance, we have our age grade census coming up. Approaching that work—which is an administrative task of necessary data collection—from a workload aware framework, we have completely changed how we support schools through that process. In the past, it was, 'Here is a 30-page guide. Go and do it', whereas now it is about making sure that we have identified regional support staff. It is about chunking that work for principals and school leaders—'It is week 1. You just need to do this little part'—then making sure we have the guidance and professional learning for principals so that they understand what that chunk of the work is.

It is about being much clearer in that situation regarding the work, dividing the work up and ensuring the support is there and proactively engaging with our schools to minimise that burden.

If we think about our teaching staff, there are things like the teaching resources that we now have developed and centralised. For instance, we have the Northern Territory learning and teaching model, which is our model for teaching and learning in the Territory that we have developed alongside AERO. By having that as a consistent practice and approach across all schools, it means teachers do not need to do the work themselves and schools do not need to do the work themselves to identify the practices in place.

Similarly, a range of curriculum materials are organised as well. The minister mentioned in her opening statement that we are celebrating Territory Day across our schools. It was not left to schools to work out how to celebrate and learn about Territory Day; we developed appropriate resources for each stage of schooling that are curriculum aligned. A teacher can pick up and run with them, no matter if they have just arrived in the Territory today and do not have the knowledge of the governance of the Territory over time that Territory Day recognises.

There are some concrete things we can point to—I have given you some examples—but we are approaching everything that we are doing with that workload aware framework. When something new comes on board, it is, 'How do we make this seamless, easy and clear, with the appropriate support for our principles and our teachers?'

Mr CHAIR: Thank you. With that answer, I will actually strike the question on notice—if you are happy as well, minister?

Mrs HERSEY: Sure.

Mr CHAIR: My final question before I hand back to the shadow minister is about violence towards teaching staff. I am curious. What is the current policy and direction towards dealing with and attempting to reduce violence towards teaching staff, particularly from students and/or parents?

Mrs HERSEY: There are certainly a lot of initiatives, and violence in schools is absolutely not tolerated at all. We brought in no phones in school which talks to taking away that violence—not being able to video fights and things like that.

There is also staff wellbeing and safety implementation currently in development, with a focus on principal professional development.

There were regional safety wellbeing officers commencing in Semester 2 this year. That roadmap is focusing on practical support for school leaders to address psychosocial risks in schools, alongside the respect and responsibility framework in schools, which was launched in April this year, outlining shared expectations around safety and wellbeing, respect, responsibility and partnership. That is making sure that everyone is responsible for that.

Violence and aggression in schools—whether it be to other students, staff or anyone working in the school—are absolutely not tolerated.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I will now hand back to the shadow minister.

Mrs HERSEY: Just before we hand back, Mr Chair, the Member for Johnston was asking about evaluation of attendance. I was looking for that before.

The reason why this was such a big thing for us to come in with an election commitment toward, was because previously when we were in government, we left the Labor government an 80.8% attendance rate—that was when we left government last time. Over that period of eight years under Labor, we saw that go down to 73.4% at the lowest point. When we came in it was 73.6%. That has dropped, as I said before, 0.6% since we have been in government. There is some evaluation, if you like. As I have explained, that 0.6% is about extreme weather events which happened. It talks to the fact that it is important to make sure that all kids go to school. The work we are doing continually across the Territory, will continue.

Ms UIBO: You said the department weekly evaluation occurs on attendance. Could you table that framework, what is used and which unit provides that information internally in the department week on, as you said?

Ms CHATTERTON: We have a dashboard where we can monitor a student's enrolment and attention—I mean attendance; it would be good to monitor attention ...

Ms UIBO: That could be used for parliament too!

Ms CHATTERTON: That is for every classroom, school and region in the Northern Territory. That dashboard is looked at daily, and that data is obtained by schools marking their rolls and the next day it is uploaded and appears in our dashboard. That is the dashboard that our attendance team and engagement officers utilise and takes them to the work. That is how we see who we need to be actively engaging and connecting with to both discuss with parents their responsibilities and explore support options which are required to enable successful re-engagement and attendance at school.

There are a number of mechanisms through which that data is reported on. Every Monday morning, the entire senior executive team of the department receive an update on that data per region on how it is in comparison to the same time last year. Senior directors of Education are the line managers of schools, and they are then able to unpack and talk about what they are seeing in different schools and the kind of strategies and support that we need to put in place. A formal report occurs every term, as well as semester and annually.

That is the core mechanism through which we are monitoring impact. It also enables us to look at resource allocation. If we need to pivot resources, while we have regionally based teams, if we are responding to exceptional circumstances, we then work as one team across the Territory and can support one another wherever the needs are.

Ms UIBO: I am familiar with the dashboard because that was developed under the former Labor government, which apparently did nothing about attendance. There you go; it is being used now to collect the data.

Could I confirm that there is no weekly evaluation. I understand the daily happens normally and the attendance data is transferred electronically to the dashboard. It tells where students move across, if they are mobile, the Territory system—I understand all that back of house. Is there a weekly evaluation of the attendance program, as you said before, and if there is, could you provide a framework and information on how that is tracked to inform the process of the truancy program which your government has implemented?

Mrs HERSEY: The acting chief executive gave a fairly comprehensive answer to your question. We do not necessarily need a framework to do that work; we just get on with the work. We are action-focused, and those people are doing the work each and every day. There is no framework. It is evaluated, as the acting chief executive said, on a daily basis and uploaded. They have weekly meetings, and I have weekly meetings to go through the data. There is no framework.

Ms UIBO: That answers the Member for Johnston's question that, no, there is no evaluation.

Mr BROWN: Attendance is going down and has been consistently under the CLP. What are you doing about that?

Mrs HERSEY: Mr Chair, I have answered that question. We have spoken for an hour and a half on attendance, which I am grateful for, but, as I said, I wish there was so much focus when they were in government.

Mr CHAIR: This question has been asked multiple times and answered multiple times.

Mr BROWN: How much has been used up in the truancy program budget over the last reporting period?

Mrs HERSEY: While I wait for the answer to that, I have an answer to Question on Notice 7.1. The question was about providing a breakdown of budget for school attendance officer programs with all staffing and administration costs.

This might answer your question now.

Answer to Question on Notice No 7.1

Mrs HERSEY: The breakdown is: student attendance and engagement, \$9,253,773; centrally coordinated engagement programs, performance monitoring and coordination, \$1,152,838; administration systems and reporting, \$122,905; there were grants for engagement programs for schools, \$399,584; and AFLNT engagement program, \$300,000.

The operational student attendance and engagement in regional teams is \$1,001,857; centrally coordinated engagement programs, performance monitoring and coordination is \$108,067; and administration systems and reporting is \$1,106.

I can table that as well, Mr Chair.

Mr BROWN: How will you meet the Better and Fairer Schools conditions of a 79% attendance rate when the overall attendance is 73%? How will you turn things around?

Mrs HERSEY: As I have stated numerous times, we will continue to make sure that through the funding of the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement there is money in schools for engagement officers which some schools have employed through their school. As well, we have attendance teams and engagement teams through the department. There are also counsellors, psychologists, ALOs, school-based constables—everyone working in a school environment to support that young person to make sure that they get back into the school system.

We will continue to do that work hard. As your previous government said, hard work is hard, and it is hard, but we will continue to do that work. Every school has an attendance plan, so they make sure that they follow through with that and with their engagement officers that they employ. It is evaluated every week. That data goes into the attendance every day. We speak about it every week in our meetings, and we will continue to do that hard work.

Mr CHAIR: We will take a 15-minute break and resume at 10.45 am.

The committee suspended.

Mr CHAIR: We recommence, and I will hand over to the shadow minister.

Ms UIBO: Can I clarify in regard to attendance? You spoke about the weather events that have been experienced in the Northern Territory. How does that affect the attendance data if there are already registered and informed absences? My understanding is the weather events would not create the decrease in attendance we are seeing. I am happy to be corrected, if that is the case.

Mrs HERSEY: I will answer a bit and then maybe the deputy chief executive can add a little. Not all of those children attended pop-up schools. There were many pop-up schools around them. There were many areas around the Territory where there was flooding, cyclones where we saw many children in Katherine, for example, did not go to school for a considerable amount of time. I know many children in your electorate did not as well. That would bring the attendance down because of the extreme weather event.

I will hand over to the deputy chief executive to add more to that.

Ms UIBO: Before the deputy speaks, I am happy for Mr van Holsteyn to clarify that the weather events would be taken out of the equation based on notified absences versus unnotified. That is the clarity I would like because my understanding is the weather events would be taken out and, therefore, null and void the reasoning for the decrease in absences based on what the minister said.

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: This will probably get quite technical quickly ...

Ms UIBO: I am happy for that.

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: Our attendance rate is calculated by the number of sessions a student attends divided by the total number of sessions. If a student is notified, for instance, as sick, it is still not counted as an attended session because they have not been at school. We have a range of notifications—I am just using sick in the first instance—that are still absent and will then will still have an impact on the attendance rate.

In the event of the emergency management, when we had a school that was closed, the total number of possible attended sessions was not counted, so it would not have had an impact on the attendance rate.

If we had a situation where, through the notification of attendance was not required for students—for instance, if they were north of the bridge in Katherine in Term 1 this year and could not get across to access education and notified, then it would be withdrawn from the attendance rate for that student because a possible session would not have occurred.

If we do not have notification and were not able to establish where a young person was, then it would have an impact on the attendance rate because we had not withdrawn or reduced the number of possible attendance sessions.

The other point that is worth noting is that when we had a disruption to the schooling of any sort, that disruption can sometimes have a tail. What I mean by that is when students get out of the habit of coming every day, it can take some time to re-establish that habit of coming every day. That is another way that a weather event can have an impact on school attendance.

Ms UIBO: In terms of the seven weather events that the minister mentioned across the Territory, only a small amount of impact would have affected this attendance data in the reporting period based on Mr van Holsteyn's response. Is that correct?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: The impact across those regions, noting that it was across all regions and some schools were significantly impacted, I do not think we can characterise it as small.

Ms UIBO: Sorry, I am not talking about the impact being small, to be clear. The question is specifically that the minister said that attendance is down due to the seven weather events. We have just heard a response of the technicalities that if a school is closed, it is not counted as attendable by a student and, therefore, would not affect their attendance data. If you are looking at the whole picture, the explanation of the seven weather events does not account for the decreases across all six regions in the Northern Territory. Attendance is still down.

Mrs HERSEY: Adding to that, not all parents notify of absences. Also, in the extreme weather events that we saw over the Territory, as a government and as a department, we close those schools at the very last minute, but potentially parents might pull their kids out three or four days before. For example, in Katherine we flooded on the Friday and over the weekend, but leading up to that parents might have chosen to have their kids at home four days prior to that.

I think Paul has given a comprehensive answer.

Ms UIBO: Noting that the Katherine floods were called late, so Friday was the earliest that I understand that students were told to go home with their families, not four days in advance.

The other question I had which was based ...

Mrs HERSEY: Member for Arnhem, what I am saying is that parents may choose to hold their children out before then. The department does not close a school until the very last minute; we want to make sure that

families' and children's lives are as normal as possible. What I am saying is that some families may choose to keep their kids home in the lead-up to that and certainly in the tail of that, which is what Paul explained.

Ms UIBO: I understand, thank you. I am just saying that obviously that did not happen in the first flooding event in Katherine.

The Member for Arafura asks a question about Better and Fairer Schools funding. Is there a penalty to the Northern Territory Government if the 79.7% attendance rate overall is not increased and, if so, what is the penalty?

Mrs HERSEY: I can take that on notice, Member for Arnhem.

Question on Notice No 7.3

Mr CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: As per the Better and Fairer Schools funding conditions of increasing student attendance to 79.7% are there any penalties to the NT Government attached to not increasing the attendance rate and, if so, what are the penalties?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.3.

Mr CHAIR: Do we know what the attendance rate would be if we did not have the attendance program in place and its supports?

Ms UIBO: Standing Order 109; is that a hypothetical, Chair?

Mr CHAIR: It is a question of do we know the attendance rate, so all we have to do is look at any students who have gone to school due to the program and you would subtract them.

Mrs HERSEY: I think that is a bit of a hypothetical, and I am happy to take it on notice. I do not have the answer.

Mr CHAIR: Two people think it is hypothetical, so I am going to humble myself to the committee.

I hand over to the Member for Arafura.

Mr BROWN: What is the total dollar amount of disability-related funding available to the NT education system? Just for clarity, how much of that is Commonwealth funding for students with disability through the Schooling Resource Standard; what is the disability-specific funding contribution from the NT Government; and how much is from any other sources of funding—for example, grants and donations?

Mrs HERSEY: We have a considerable amount going to disability. We have our special education school with \$110m, which we are spending towards that new state-of-the-art building in Palmerston. We have heard loud and clear that there are many children with additional needs. That was another election commitment.

There is \$107.5m allocated in the 2026 calendar year for direct school resourcing through student needs-based and targeted funding which is an increase of \$8m.

There is also \$14.1m for inclusion programs and SWIPS.

Mr BROWN: What was that last bit?

Mrs HERSEY: That is the Student Wellbeing, Inclusion and Program Services. There is \$14.1m. I will hand over to the Jasmin Aldenhoven, Chief Financial Officer, for an overall report.

Mr BROWN: Also, can you give me the total of all the programs?

Ms ALDENHOVEN: The amounts in the 2026–27 budget, from an operating expenditure perspective, is \$109,290,517. That comprises both services and programs to support students with disability, grant programs such as student advocacy, inclusion and education support, and NCCD funding. That is all the sources—Australian Government and NT Government.

Mr BROWN: Do we have the proportion between NT Government and the federal government funding?

Ms ALDENHOVEN: No, not in front of me.

Mr BROWN: I will get that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.4

Mr CHAIR: Member for Arafura, please restate the question for the record.

Mr BROWN: What is the total amount of the disability-related funding available from the NT education system, with a breakdown of contributions from the NT Government and the federal government towards that program?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.4.

Mr BROWN: Can the minister confirm that the categories collectively account for 100% of the disability-related funding and reconcile to the total funding amount identified earlier?

Mrs HERSEY: Can you clarify the categories? Are we going to outputs, or are we still on the opening statement?

Mr CHAIR: That is up to you. If you would like to go to outputs, you can direct to outputs.

Mr BROWN: Can the minister confirm that the categories collectively account for 100% of the disability-related funding and reconcile to the total funding amount identified earlier?

Mrs HERSEY: In 2026 direct school resourcing NCCD funding, there was \$24,941,520; special schools there was \$40,918,225; special annexes there was \$21,384,655; and universal students with disabilities there was \$20,209,604. There is high extensive funding to students, which is \$2m.

Ms UIBO: When you say 'special annexes' does that include the flexible learning centres, or is that separate?

Mrs HERSEY: No, they are separate.

Ms UIBO: Is there a category of any of that disability funding that goes to the flexible learning centres, or does that count under the mainstream SRS?

Mrs HERSEY: The students with disability funding goes to where that student is enrolled, whether they are at an annexe, a disability school or a flexi centre. It goes with the student.

Ms UIBO: I am conscious that sometimes flexi centres are attached to a mainstream school. For example, in your electorate of Katherine, Katherine High School has the flexible learning centre; that is auspiced by the high school. Would that funding go to Katherine High School or would it go to the Katherine flexible learning centre?

Mrs HERSEY: Again, it goes to where that student is. That flexi learning centre in Katherine, for example, is funded through Katherine High School; it follows the student.

Ms UIBO: It would go to the high school and then they would auspice that out to the flexi.

J DAVIS: Following on from the questions by the Member for Arafura, how many compulsory school-age children in the NT are known to have a disability?

Mrs HERSEY: The percentage of children with a disability in the Territory in 2025 is 37.9%.

J DAVIS: Is that of school-age children?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes, that is government schools.

J DAVIS: How many of that 37.9% currently are not enrolled in any school?

Mrs HERSEY: That data—37.9%—is on children enrolled and attending school. If they were even homeschooled or through other forms of school—School of the Air or flexi leaning—they would be counted in that data.

J DAVIS: Is there data on children with disability who are not enrolled in any educational institution?

Mrs HERSEY: If they are not enrolled we would not have that data—maybe Health may have that. Unless that parent specifically says, 'I am removing my child and they will not be enrolled and I will not bring them', we would not have that data. It would not be tracked.

J DAVIS: So I am clear, 37.9% of students enrolled in public education system have a disability?

Mrs HERSEY: In 2025, yes.

J DAVIS: Do you have the attendance rates for students with disabilities?

Mrs HERSEY: No.

J DAVIS: Because you do not collect that or ...

Mrs HERSEY: All students who attend school are collected in that attendance data. We do not analyse what their specific needs are. For example, if they are attending school they are tracked in the attendance data.

J DAVIS: There is no aggregation of what students with disability attendance rates are compared to students without a disability?

Mrs HERSEY: No.

J DAVIS: Do you collect data on students with disability who are suspended?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

J DAVIS: Are you able to share what proportion of all suspension incidents and suspension days were issued to students with disability?

Mrs HERSEY: Chair, would we like to go into the outputs, because I did not discuss that in my opening statement?

J DAVIS: I am happy to leave that for the output. I can leave the rest.

Mrs HERSEY: You want to move to the outputs?

J DAVIS: Sorry, I am happy to wait until we get to the outputs. I would like that answered under the output. I will ask it then.

Mr CHAIR: We will go to outputs for that. Member for Johnston, any other questions on the opening statement?

J DAVIS: No.

Mr MACKAY: Going back to attendance data, we talked about non-Indigenous and Indigenous attendance rates. I note they are in the budget papers 3 and the agency statement. Do we track the English as a Second

Language non-Indigenous student attendance—those from non-English speaking backgrounds who are not necessarily Indigenous, noting there is a high proportion in my electorate?

Mrs HERSEY: Are you talking about the intensive English unit or are you just talking specifically about what ethnicity they are or whether they are Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal or multicultural?

Mr MACKAY: To clarify, at the schools of my electorate of Goyder in the rural area have a high proportion of Vietnamese, Thai and Cambodian students who would be captured under ESL programs, in my experience when I went to school with a lot of them. I am wondering if there is specific attendance data for those students engaged in English as a Second Language?

Mrs HERSEY: No, we do not segregate attendance like that.

Mr MACKAY: However, we do segregate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous? Is that the only breakdown of attendance data that we segregate?

Mrs HERSEY: Correct.

Mr MACKAY: With the attendance officers that were mentioned in the opening statement, how many people have been employed under that program? The follow-up will be where are they based?

Mrs HERSEY: There are 54 positions available, and 45 are occupied. Six of those are assistant directors who oversee the six regional teams, and all are occupied; 24 are school attendance officers, of which 19 are occupied; 22 are student engagement advisors who undertake case management for students requiring support to return to school, and 18 are occupied; and two are education program coordinators who undertake multiagency complex case management for students who have intersected with the youth justice system, and both are occupied.

Do you want a breakdown by region?

Mr MACKAY: Yes, where are they based?

Mrs HERSEY: In the Barkly, there is an assistant director, two student engagement advisors, two school attendance officers, which takes the total to five.

In Big Rivers, there is one assistant director, four engagement advisors and four school attendance officers, taking that to nine.

In central, there is one assistant director, five student engagement officers, five attendance officers and one program coordinator, so they have 12.

In Darwin, there is one assistant director, five student engagement advisors, five school attendance officers and one education program coordinator, taking that to 12.

In East Arnhem, there is one assistant director, three engagement advisors and four school attendance officers, taking that to eight.

In the Top End, there is one assistant director, three student engagement advisors and four school attendance officers, taking that to eight.

Mr MACKAY: How many students fall in the 60% to 80% attendance category? I understand schools track whether students are chronically not attending or have the odd day off. How many are in that slipping category of attendance.

Mrs HERSEY: How many on the attendance support roll?

Mr MACKAY: An individual student might attend and miss one day a week, so it is 80% attendance if they miss more than one day a week. Is there a breakdown? I have seen schools reporting it, and I wondered if the department keeps a breakdown. Noting that one student not attending all year brings down the average significantly, how many are in that 60% to 80%, three to four days a week, category?

Mrs HERSEY: That is more high-level data that the department tracks, but we do not have it here. I am happy to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No 7.5

Mr CHAIR: Member for Goyder, please restate the question for the record.

Mr MACKAY: With the attendance data, how many students, as a percentage of enrolment, would fall into the 60% to 80% attendance category?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.5.

Mr MACKAY: I am jumping around because I understand that we want to progress. In the opening statement you mentioned singing the two verses of the national anthem at assemblies. Do we have any understanding if all schools have implemented this policy?

Mrs HERSEY: There are senior directors in the regions visiting schools to make sure that schools are singing the national anthem. I take this seriously that people need to have pride in their country and Territory—we have Territory Day coming up as well. We said that all schools should sing two verses of the national anthem, and not all schools are doing that.

I was at Ramingining last week, and the principal said, 'I have a confession to make; we did not do it.' They will send me a video of them signing the national anthem by the end of Term 3.

I was also at Namarluk last week—they were celebrating four years of education—and the rendition with the signing of the national anthem in two verses was a tear-jerker and quite heartwarming.

I was at the celebration of the 60th anniversary of School of the Air over the weekend, with all of the children on the screens at their stations, or wherever they are doing their education, all singing the national anthem. It was all together on the one screen with all their little faces. It was fantastic.

I make sure to check when I go to schools. Not all schools are doing it, but it is an expectation from me as the minister that all schools sing the national anthem and they do sing two verses. We are working on that with senior directors and with the team when they go to remote schools and throughout the Territory.

Mr BROWN: Would you accept English as a second language-speaking communities to sing the national anthem in their language?

Mrs HERSEY: It is great to hear children singing in their language, but it is also something that they sing in English, and then they can sing that in their language as well. I have been out to Gamardi recently, at the opening of the independent school. There is a strong cultural background, a strong sense of family, culture and passing on songlines. It is about walking in two worlds, as I am sure you know, and making sure that we do both.

Mr MACKAY: Earlier you mentioned you had a breakdown by electorate of school-based attendance. Is this something you can either table it or I can ask for it on notice?

Mrs HERSEY: I have a breakdown of schools by electorate. I am happy to read it all out or to table it.

Mr MACKAY: I would be satisfied with tabling.

Going back to the attendance officers, in the greater Darwin region, how many schools are within the area that they are responsible for? Is it 40 schools or 50 schools for those people?

Mrs HERSEY: Is that in the Top End region only?

Mr MACKAY: Whatever the rural area of Darwin is encompassed in.

Mrs HERSEY: That is the Top End.

In the Top End region, which you are in, there are 36 schools, and in the Darwin region there are 27 schools. In East Arnhem there are 13 schools; there are 28 in Big Rivers; 13 in Barkly; and 36 in Central.

Mrs CARLSON: In your opening statement you gave a brief overview of the transition from the middle schools to the full high schools model. Can I have an update on the transition for Dripstone—now secondary college as it is called—for me as the Member for Wanguri and for the Member for Casuarina? How is it progressing this year? What procedures are in place as the school grows in attracting teachers to ensure there is sufficient staffing at the school as it grows?

Mrs HERSEY: As you stated, we are moving away from middle schools and going to full, comprehensive schools by 2028. This year, Dripstone, in its Year 10 cohort were expected to have an extra 73 students, but has 84 students, which is an increase of 11. That is just for Year 10 enrolments. The enrolments are monitored closely by the department. Dripstone has upgraded its science laboratory, which was \$385,000. It is in progress now.

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: The move away from middle schools is part of the secondary reform is a very exciting part of our work. Dripstone has extended to have Year 10. The minister identified that it exceeded its enrolments for that cohort from what we anticipated it would achieve. As part of the support for our schools to make this change, we looked at infrastructure work across our schools. The minister identified that there is a science upgrade we are looking at to support the move to those senior year programs.

We provided additional funding to each of those schools to establish the new Year levels. Dripstone, under that process received \$146,000 of funding for establishment and additional funding for signage. This process will continue with extending to Year 11 next year and to Year 12 in 2028 when it will become a full Years 7 to 12 school.

J DAVIS: I would like to ask a similar question about now Nightcliff High School. It is not in my electorate, but many young people in my electorate attend that school. Can I have an update on the move to high school there?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: Like Dripstone, Nightcliff has extended to Year 10 this year. They have also exceeded their expected enrolments in the school; it is a smaller cohort although we expect that cohort will grow over time. There has been additional support for infrastructure works on that school site. The infrastructure we have been working on there has been also a science laboratory upgrade which is in progress. Some of the VET spaces, construction space and an upgrade to the engineering space have both been completed now. Like Dripstone, Nightcliff has received funding to help establish the start of the new year levels and have received funding to update their signage as well.

Mr CHAIR: For Driver High?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: Driver High School now has a Year 10 cohort. Like the other schools, we are funding infrastructure works at Driver. There is a shade structure that we preparing a tender for. Driver was also identified in the opening statement by the minister with some additional upgrades that have been identified in this year's budget announcement regarding major works.

In terms of student numbers for Driver, Driver did not extend to Year 10. Driver brought on a Year 7 cohort this year. It had a slightly smaller expected number of Year 7s, but it had more Year 10s retained in the school than we anticipated. The total school population at Driver has exceeded our projections this year, which is a fabulous sign.

Like the other schools we have identified, Driver has been supported with establishment costs to cater for and get ready for that new year level of Year 7s that have come in, and signage.

Mr CHAIR: Using Driver as an example, if it exceeds its numbers and that projection continues, at what point does this department allocate additional teaching staff?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: This secondary reform has meant that we cannot use our regular funding model because it is based on the population we had last year. The funding model we have used projections for the expected population, given the schools are changing in their composition.

We have then leaned out to monitor actual enrolments closely and then updated the funding for those schools to match the enrolment that has come. We have done that for all the schools that have had an increased

enrolment. The funding that has been approved this year reflects the enrolments they have been securing. That will enable them to employ the teaching staff they need to cater for the students they have.

Mr BROWN: In relation to funding for additional needs and specialised positions mentioned in the opening statement, how many inclusion advisors, speech therapists, occupational therapists, vision and hearing advisors and behaviour coaches are currently working in the Northern Territory?

Mrs HERSEY: There are positions up to 26 March this year: eight psychologists; 20 school social workers; two assistant directors, Psychology Services; eight positive behaviour implementation coaches; five occupational therapists; three speech pathologists; and eight assistant directors, Client Services. There are also 22 senior teachers who are inclusion educators.

Mr BROWN: Can you provide a base rate per student in the student needs-based funding formula?

Mrs HERSEY: Given the complexity I will have to hand that over to Jasmin Aldenhoven, the Chief Financial Officer.

Ms ALDENHOVEN: The per student place rate for the 2026 school year is \$8,687.

Mr BROWN: How did it get to that? Is there a formula?

Ms ALDENHOVEN: Every year we have a base rate that has been created as part of the school resourcing model, which is the student needs-based funding. That base rate is, as it states, the base rate. The value is indexed each year. Also, last year it was increased by \$250 each for strategic initiatives around boosting literacy and numeracy.

On top of that, we apply the weightings and the needs-base loadings of students. That data is collected in the age-grade census in August. Once you have the student-needs profile, the rate per student for the student is calculated. It starts off with the base rate and then multiplied.

We have the base rate, then there will be a year level loading, a socioeconomic status loading, Aboriginal status loading, Aboriginal concentration and remoteness of the school, English as additional dialect and language, students with disability, distance education and the school size. If it is a small school, we will make sure that there is a minimum funding level and they will be provided with a school-size supplement.

Mr BROWN: In line with that, what happened if the student assessment does not occur before the census in August?

Mrs HERSEY: Do you mean before the child has a diagnosis?

Mr BROWN: In regard to the August census that was mentioned earlier. They are assessed and then become part of the data. If they are not included before then, do they miss out or are they added on later?

Mrs HERSEY: To be added into that the child has to have an assessment to be inclusive in that data. If a student has not had an assessment, they ...

Mr BROWN: They do not get the money?

Mrs HERSEY: I will hand to the Acting Chief Executive.

Ms CHATTERTON: Just clarifying; is this in relation to students with additional needs?

Ms UIBO: Yes, thank you.

Ms CHATTERTON: My colleague mentioned before some of that work we do to support schools in the leadup to the Age Grade Census. We do a lot of professional learning to support teachers to understand the kind of evidence that they can be collecting to show the additional needs that a student might have. They do not require a formal diagnosis; it is actually about what the level of adjustment or help that a young person needs to be able to access the curriculum, teaching and learning. Then, based on that, a young person is allocated a level and funding is allocated to that level.

Mr BROWN: Thank you for that.

Ms UIBO: Thank you very much, Chair. I thought I would let my shadow minister lead those sections.

Minister, can you please outline the programs that have been reduced or cut in the Department of Education as part of the \$20m savings that every department has been asked to find, and can you also table that information?

Mrs HERSEY: Chair, I am not sure if that has already been a written question which has already been supplied.

Ms UIBO: Are you able to outline for the committee? The written question would have been returned today, I assume, whilst we are in this session—which is what has been happening with every other minister.

Mrs HERSEY: The Department of Education and Training's contribution to the \$20m whole-of-government savings equated to 0.0567% of its budget and applied as an efficiency dividend across the agency consistent with usual parameters applied at each budget.

That is managed as a whole.

Ms UIBO: Are there any specific cuts to programs or reductions of programs within Education due to the efficiency dividend?

Mrs HERSEY: No. As I stated, the savings of 0.0567%—that was across the agency efficiency. That is just by being more efficient.

Ms UIBO: So \$20m of efficiency that was not being done before, but no cuts to any programs or reductions to any programs? Is that correct?

Mrs HERSEY: No, there are no cuts to any programs. It is putting money where there is more priority and making sure that the department is a whole lot more efficient. We have found those efficiencies, but we have not cut any programs.

Ms UIBO: Would the efficiencies be changes to travel arrangements, pooling with other departments—what types of deficiencies have been found?

Mrs HERSEY: I will have to the Deputy Chief Executive Tony Considine.

Mr CONSIDINE: Thank you, minister. Thank you, Opposition Leader.

In this case there was \$20m that was a whole-of-government efficiency. The minister has pointed out how that equated to 0.05% across our whole budget. Generally, we try to land our budgets within 1%; so it is within our landing zone—within our budget. That portion of money did not contribute to any change in any program overall; it is a very small percentage across all budgets and is easily managed within budgets.

Our staff within our teams—if a budget is slightly smaller—make decisions about what they are doing.

Ms UIBO: Thank you for the clarification.

Mrs HERSEY: I am just checking, Chair. We have moved to outputs, because I do not think that was in the opening statement.

Mr CHAIR: No, we are still on the opening statement. You are free to direct to outputs.

Mrs HERSEY: We can move to outputs.

Ms UIBO: I still have a question about another topic in the opening statement.

Minister, you spoke about the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (RATE). What is the current KPI for the students in the RATE program, and what is the target figure?

Mrs HERSEY: For the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education, as of 31 March, there were 411 participants across 65 sites. I think in relation to the—can you restate the question?

Ms UIBO: You have answered the first half, thank you; it was 411 students in the program across 65 sites. Was there a target set by the department of how many participants should be in the RATE program?

Mrs HERSEY: No, Member for Arnhem, there are no targets as such in the RATE program. Of those 411 participants we have 153 in vocational and educational training courses, predominantly at Batchelor. We have 70 in the tertiary courses with CDU, which is nearly three times more than was in March 2025. Whilst we do not have any predictions of numbers, it has increased considerably, which is fantastic.

Ms UIBO: I am glad the CLP did not cut that program; it is an important one. Minister, how much funding is going towards the RATE program in this financial year for the reporting period of Estimates and then into the new budget? There will be two parts to it.

Mrs HERSEY: The 2026–27 RATE program has a budget of \$2.5m. That is helping overcome our national teacher shortages. We want to increase workforce engagement and building capacity, and we want to make sure that in the remote communities we have Aboriginal educators, which are fantastic. We will be supporting them across the department. I will get the numbers for the previous reporting period. Is that enough information for you?

Ms UIBO: For the first half, but you were going to give me the budget from the Estimates reporting period.

Mrs HERSEY: It is \$2.8m.

Ms UIBO: Given that you have just said what a great program RATE is, why is there a decrease of \$300,000?

Mrs HERSEY: Last time it was 2.8; this year it is 2.5. We evaluated that program and that extra 0.3 was to do that. Whilst we value the RATE program—as I said there is almost three times as many people in that program—that evaluation has spoken for itself.

Ms UIBO: Who conducted the evaluation and is that available publicly?

Mrs HERSEY: The department did that evaluation.

Ms UIBO: The department has done an internal evaluation for the costing of \$300,000 for its own program, then taken away from the budget of RATE which mean less money to support those remote Aboriginal teachers in the education program to become fully qualified teachers. Is that correct?

Mrs HERSEY: Sorry, it was Deloitte that did that evaluation of that program and it is not final yet. It is being finalised at present.

Ms UIBO: Will that evaluation of \$300,000 to Deloitte be made public for the Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education program?

Mr CHAIR: On that one, if you can, Opposition Leader, can we ask that in a way that does not ask the minister to announce something new? What is the current policy around publishing?

Ms UIBO: I am happy to take your advice, Chair.

Mrs HERSEY: Whilst that evaluation is under way and still being evaluated, it is up to the minister whether that is made public or not. I cannot see why we would not make it public. I do not think there is ...

Ms UIBO: Do you have a time frame for when that evaluation and report will be completed by Deloitte?

Mrs HERSEY: It is the end of June this year.

Ms UIBO: Do you anticipate, with the 411 RATE students within the department, that the completion will be in the corresponding years? Do you have an expectation of how many students will have completed their qualifications in the reporting period? Do you have a number—not expectation, do you have the figure for the number of completed student within the reporting period, or is that ongoing?

Mrs HERSEY: That would be ongoing.

Ms UIBO: With the figures of the 411 students who are participating, how many of those participants are full-time employees for the department of Education and how many are school council employees?

Mrs HERSEY: I am happy to take that on notice. We do not have that breakdown.

Question on Notice No 7.6

Mr CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: Of the 411 RATE students, how many are full-time employed in the Department of Education and Training and how many are employed as school council employees across the Northern Territory?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.6.

Ms UIBO: I have done with that line of questioning.

Agency-Related Whole-of-Government Questions on Budget and Fiscal Strategy

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2026–27 as they relate to the Department of Education and Training. Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

Mr BROWN: At the Education minister's meeting on 22 August, the Australian Government coordinated action with all states and territories, and it will invest up to \$189m to strengthen safety and quality in early childhood education and care settings. How much of the \$189m was NTG funding?

Mrs HERSEY: That work is underway, it has not been determined what that amount is? All the federal funding agreements are yet to be finalised.

Mr BROWN: According to Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, safety is the biggest area of concern when it comes to not meeting the national quality standard. In the NT only 8% of services are rated as working towards the national quality standard, and only 8% are rated as exceeding the national quality standards. Why has only \$1.1m been allocated to Early Childhood Safe Start, Strong Futures and how is that amount of funding an appropriate amount to fix this concerning issue?

Mrs HERSEY: In December we came out with our Early Childhood Safe Start, Strong Futures Plan, and for the record we were coming off a very low bar. We were last in the nation for safety to which we have now, through our Safe Start, Strong Futures Plan, moved to fourth, hoping to move up to third with a bit more evaluation. Ninety per cent of all Northern Territory childcare centres are now meeting or exceeding the national quality standards, which are the best numbers on record. Out of the Safe Start, Strong Futures Plan we set an expectation that a hundred percent of services would meet or exceed Quality Area 2, which is safety, by 30 June, and 85% of services to meet or exceed those national quality standards by December 2026.

As of 1 June 90% of Territory childcare centres are meeting or exceeding the national quality standards, which is well ahead of our December target. In fact, it is the best numbers on record since the sequel started quarterly updates. That is a good news story, Member for Arafura.

Ms UIBO: I appreciate your response, and I note you put out a media release today with that same figure of 90%. The figure I have for quarter 1, 2025, was 91%. Can you provide clarification for that? You said that it was the best number on record at 90%, but I have 91% for quarter 1, 2025. Can you confirm that and, if so, clarify for the committee that you have given the incorrect information through your media release?

Mrs HERSEY: The only thing I can think of, Member for Arnhem, is that maybe there is a typo. I do not have any further information on that. As of 31 March ...

Ms UIBO: Is it 90% this year but 91% quarter 1, 2025, could you please provide that clarification?

Mrs HERSEY: We need to double-check that number.

Ms UIBO: It is in your media release.

Mrs HERSEY: I am not talking about my media release, I am talking about the number you said for last year.

Ms UIBO: It was 91% which would then be the best on record, re quoting your response. Are you checking for last year's quarter, or do you need that on notice, if that is what you are comparing it to, year-on year-out data. That is what you put out today ahead of your Estimates session and it is incorrect information ...

Mrs HERSEY: You were talking about Quality Area 2, we are talking about all those quality areas as Quality Area 2 is now 96%.

Ms UIBO: For clarification, is 90% the best percentage of the Exceeding National Quality Standard or is it 91% based on last year's data of quarter one 2025. If not is last year's data incorrect?

Mrs HERSEY: I have that data and the 91% that you are talking about is the overall rating in NQF quarter one, which is the national data. With the 91% data which was nationally last year, the figure in the Territory was actually 78%. The national data this year is 93% but the Territory is 90%.

Ms UIBO: I have your media release in front of me quoting, '90% of all Northern Territory childcare centres are now meeting or exceeding the National Quality Standards and its NQS are the best numbers on record'; The data I have about 91% in quarter one 2025 relates to the meeting or exceeding National Quality Standards. Is your media release incorrect or is the data released last year incorrect?

Mrs HERSEY: I have put out a media release today and the figures are correct. I want to double-check them.

Question on Notice No 7.7

Mr CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: Can you confirm the quarter one 2025 data, which I have as 91% of NT childcare centres meeting or exceeding National Quality Standards is correct, and if so does this mean your media release today, 16 June 2026 stating 90% of all Northern Territory childcare centres are now meeting or exceeding National Quality Standards—NQS—the best numbers on record is incorrect?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.7.

The committee suspended.

Mrs HERSEY: I will also clarify the previous question before we went to lunch. I have answers to questions 7.2 and 7.3.

Mr CHAIR: We will continue. We are with the Minister for Education and on questions related to agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy.

Mrs HERSEY: Before we move on, I want to clarify: the Member for Arnhem asked me a question before, challenging the data in the media release today. I had a look into this at lunchtime. She was going on the NT childcare centres which last year, there were 234. We now have 235. On the ACECQA website, that was all centres whether they were working towards, whether they were meeting or whether they were exceeding and that was 91%. In my media release today, we are saying all the centres that are meeting and exceeding only is 91%. We are not counting in working towards. There are some centres that have been working towards for seven years. That is under the previous government.

We brought in our Safe Start, Strong Futures Plan. We are making sure that we are holding centres to account and that they are safe and looking after people's children. Of all those childcare centres in all quality areas are at 90%.

Mr CHAIR: Can you clarify what the 91% figure is?

Mrs HERSEY: The 91% in the NT that the Member for Arnhem was talking about, was 234 centres that were either working towards, meeting or exceeding but we are only focusing on those areas that are meeting or exceeding, which is 90%. It is a very good thing that 90% of centres are meeting or exceeding.

Mr CHAIR: Did you want to read the answers for 7.2 or 7.3, or are you happy to just table them?

Mrs HERSEY: I'll tabled them.

Mr BROWN: From July to December 2025, quality education and care NT—QECNT—offered to reassess services which had one to two quality areas rated working towards partial reassessments. The reassessment was only offered to some services. How many services were eligible for the targeted partial reassessment? How many services engaged in the reassessment process? How many services were rated better after partial reassessment? Which services were they and how many services have not changed?

Mrs HERSEY: I will collect all that. There were probably about six questions in that one question. I will get that data.

I might part-way through, get you to reinstate some of your question. What was the first part of it, thanks?

Mr BROWN: In regard to the quality education and care NT offered reassessed services. How many services were eligible for the partial reassessment?

Mrs HERSEY: I can give you how many visits, notifications, incidents, complaints reported, but I do not have a breakdown of those partial—what your questions was.

Mr BROWN: That is fine. Do you want to break that down or are you happy ...

Mrs HERSEY: The question is are you happy to potentially take it on notice because we do not have the breakdown?

Mr BROWN: Yes, we will take it on notice then.

Mrs HERSEY: Some of that question—there were about six different things in that question.

Question on Notice No 7.8

Mr CHAIR: Member for Arafura, please restate the question for the record.

Mr BROWN: From July to December 2025, QECNT offered to reassess services which had one to two quality areas rated working towards through partial reassessments. The reassessments were only offered to some services.

- How many services were eligible?
- How many services engaged for reassessment process?
- How many services rated better after partial reassessment?
- Which services were they?
- How many services had no change?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes. I will give some answer to some of that with what I have. I think it was July you were talking about. From 1 July 2025 to 31 March 2026, the Australian Government issued four notices to impose conditions to four NT services. The Australian Government took action by applying conditions that stated that the services needed to be assessed as meeting the national quality standard or they will no longer receive childcare subsidy from the Australian Government.

Of those four services that had conditions applied, three had not achieved a meeting NQS rating for more than seven years—which is what I said before—and the last had not achieved meeting NQS for between five to seven years.

Three of those services are now rated at 'meeting', while one remains 'working towards'. The Australian Government will propose new conditions due to a new provider taking over that service from January 2026. That is part of the answer to some of your questions.

No service in the NT had their childcare subsidy removed.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the rest of the question on notice?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.8.

Mr BROWN: In quarter 1 of 2026, how many compliance notices were issued to services? How many compliance directions were issued to services? How many services had their approval cancelled?

I think you have partly answered.

Mrs HERSEY: No services have had their approval cancelled. That is the answer to your last question.

Member for Arafura we will incorporate that into the other question if you would like to restate it and it can all go as one question. Is that okay, Mr Chair?

Mr CHAIR: Yes.

Mr BROWN: You will take that on notice, then?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Question on Notice No 7.9

Mr CHAIR: Member for Arafura, please restate the question for the record.

Mr BROWN: In quarter 1 of 2026, how many compliance notices were issued to service, how many compliance directions were issued to services, and how many services have had their approval cancelled?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.9.

Mr CHAIR: I remind the committee we are on Agency Related Whole-of-Government Questions on Budget and Fiscal Strategies.

Mr BROWN: Thriving Kids is intended to deliver support in children's everyday settings including classrooms and preschools rather than only in clinic-based services. How is the Education department planning to embed Thriving Kids support in school and early childhood programs so that children are not constantly pulled out of learning for separate therapy sessions?

Mrs HERSEY: Are we in early childhood?

Mr CHAIR: For those questions you can ask the minister which output group. Can we keep the current questions on budget and fiscal strategies, please.

You are free to ask the minister which output group?

Mr BROWN: Is that listed on Output 1.1, Early Childhood Education and Care Services?

Mr CHAIR: You can confirm with the minister which output group on which you can ask the question? We are not on output 1 yet. We are still on budget and fiscal strategies. Once we conclude this, we will move to Output Group 1.0.

Mr BROWN: Are you happy to move to Output Group 1?

Mr CHAIR: Do you have any further questions on budget and fiscal strategies?

Minister, I have a question and if this is better pointed to an output group. Please advise me which group. In relation to curriculum and tied federal funding and what I am trying to get at is the curriculum we teach in the NT, how tied is that to federal funding and how much freedom do we have to change our own curriculum?

Mr CONSIDINE: In response to the question, you are referring to the Better, Fairer Schools Agreement. I believe that sits across as our funding agreement for schools.

Mr CHAIR: Yes, all funding from the Commonwealth.

Mr CONSIDINE: The Better, Fairer Schools Agreement ties us to Australia curriculum and we are required to deliver the Australian curriculum, so that curriculum runs from 2 to 10. Beyond that, we deliver a curriculum tied to South Australia which is the SACE curriculum. We deliver it under what we call the Northern Territory Certificate of Education and Training. We are required only to deliver the Australian Curriculum under that piece, but we have conditions that are also set that overlap into our curriculum areas in terms of outputs that we may have for students completing their Certificate of Education and things like that, but we are tied to the Australian Curriculum, as is every signatory in Australia to the BFSA.

Mr CHAIR: Am I correct in saying legally the NT could set its curriculum, but to get the funding we have to do what the Commonwealth curriculum sets out?

Mr CONSIDINE: Minister, can I answer a hypothetical question? Hypothetically, I would think the answer would be yes, but it may be without Australian Government funding which will probably mean no.

Mr CHAIR: Is it correct to say that the Commonwealth controls curriculum through the budget allocation even though on paper it would seem the NT has the right to set a curriculum but essentially states and territories cannot because we need the funding?

Mr CONSIDINE: It would be fair to say that the Commonwealth sets the Australian Curriculum that provides the guidelines on which we operate. The Australian Curriculum allows us latitude to be able to contextualise elements of it to suit the context that we operate in.

Mr CHAIR: With that contextualisation could I have an example of how we contextualise something for the NT curriculum?

Mr CONSIDINE: I will give you an example, a simple one, we have a significant Aboriginal population in the Territory. As part of the curriculum that we deliver we deliver our Indigenous Languages and Cultures program which is specifically designed and suited to different contexts in the Northern Territory so it adapts to five different contexts right from full bilingual to an area where we might have people just trying to learn about a culture in that area, so it allows us that scope, and that fits within the context of the Australian Curriculum and us being able to deliver that.

Mr CHAIR: What are things we cannot contextualise, what are things that are strapped in? The point of my question is—I am trying to think how we best shape NT education which will be very different to what kids in western Sydney and the relevancy they might have. Obviously, there is cross over with certain things, mathematics, English—I get all that—but I am trying to see how we are limited by the federal government, does that make sense?

Mr CONSIDINE: I think I understand the context of your question. I am not sure that we are limited by the government because we have that contextualisation of curriculum. What we do show is a progression of skills and processes throughout a child's progression through the curriculum streams and over the years, that is the important part from us. We want to teach young people skills, processes and the content. A lot of people get lost and think it is just the content that we teach, but it is a lot more than that. It is the skills and

processes, because after a child leaves school the thing that they can apply are the skills and processes not necessarily the content. If you thought about how many times you applied American history probably not many, but have you applied some of the skills you learned in analysis of that work there might be quite a few.

Collectively, the Australian Curriculum Assessment Reporting Authority, ACARA, that is the national body, a national company, it works with all states and territories, and we are able to influence what goes on with ACARA because we have a member on that board.

Mr CHAIR: Within in that, things like the books our children are reading, do we pick that at NT Government level or is that set nationally?

Mr CONSIDINE: We choose the vast majority of texts that are used. We source texts that are appropriate for the context of the young people we are working with. Quite often we see elements in the media where they are talking about a specific text or novel. We set the novels that we are utilising.

J DAVIS: In relation to not just curriculum but also the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, are there specific outcomes that the Territory is expected to achieve against that funding?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes, there is. I will let Tony Considine elaborate on that.

Mr CONSIDINE: The NT bilateral agreement commits our department to a reasonably wide range of reforms. They include enhanced literacy support—the minister has made reference to quite a few of these as we have gone through, so I will not dwell on them, and you can certainly stop me if you want me to speak further on one. They also include the implementation of enrolment-based funding—I remember that being a topic here for many of the Estimates sessions—for government schools, and the secondary education reforms.

We have a series of targets against national improvement measures, which include Year 12 certification—one of the things I alluded to a moment ago—our NAPLAN results and student attendance.

We are also part of the Initial Teacher Education (ITE); that means we have an agreement about what the standard of initial teachers coming into the profession are. That is covered in that.

As part of the bilateral we also provide an annual funding report, and that includes the total amount of funding that we provide to our government schools and non-government schools. That money comes in as one. That is reviewed by the National School Resourcing Board. Under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, our first one of those annual funding reports is due on 30 November this year.

J DAVIS: Can you say how the Northern Territory is going against those outcomes that are a part of the funding agreement?

Mrs HERSEY: As Tony has said, reporting will happen in November this year. The first report is due to the Australian Government by 30 November and will cover the 2025 calendar year.

J DAVIS: To your knowledge, what happens if we fail to achieve the outcomes required under that agreement?

Mr CONSIDINE: We were talking then about the review that happens under the National School Resourcing Board. Generally, after our report goes in, we meet with the board. The board will look at our report and then come back to us to do an assessment of the report and ask any questions they need to. It is then up to them to make a decision if there is any action to be taken as a result of that. I can give you an example. In the work that we have done this year there was no action taken as we had met what we needed to meet.

J DAVIS: I know I cannot ask a hypothetical. Around federal funding against particular agreements in education, if the NT does not meet the outcomes, can they take the money back? What is the requirement, and what are the potential consequences if we do not do what we are given money to do?

Mr CONSIDINE: It would appear that they could impose a condition, but that condition is not spelled out in black and white. The National School Resourcing Board could impose a condition on it. That condition, I suppose, could be in terms of future funding, but we have never been in that situation. For me to answer it, it would get into the hypothetical.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES
Output 1.1 – Early Childhood Education and Care Services

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 1.0, Early Childhood Education and Care Services, and Output 1.1, Early Childhood Education and Care Services.

Are there any questions?

Mrs HERSEY: Mr Chair, I have an answer to question on notice 7.4.

Mr CHAIR: Do you want to read it or table it?

Mrs HERSEY: I will table it.

Mr CHAIR: The minister will table the answer to question on notice 7.4.

Mr BROWN: Thriving Kids is intended to deliver sports in children's everyday settings, including classrooms and preschools, rather than only in the clinic-based services. How is the Education department planning to embed Thriving Kids support into schools and early learning programs so that children are not consistently pulled out of learning for separate therapy sessions?

Mrs HERSEY: This also sits with Minister Charls who has already been. In relation to Education, over the coming months the government will be supported by key sector partners which will undertake targeted consultation with sector representatives and peak bodies, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and community members to inform the design and effective delivery of Thriving Kids.

There is consultation happening at the moment. It will help identify places where families already engage with support and services to ensure that Thriving Kids is embedded in existing community settings and aligned with local need.

Mr BROWN: Can you outline how the government plans to implement the Thriving Kids agenda for children under six years of age, particularly in communities where childcare services are unavailable or insufficient?

Mrs HERSEY: I just spoke to that. Through some of that Thriving Kids, it will be ensured that there is flexibility for local decision-making regarding who receives a service with embedded clear objectives. This is important. Also making sure that there are clear referral pathways for children and parents is a strong focus of the design of the model.

The Thriving Kids initiative will interface with NDIS—which is maybe where you are going with that—which is another key focus area to make sure that there is clear public-facing messaging to minimise confusion and worry for families.

J DAVIS: You said that there will be people working together to make sure that whatever is being put in place regarding Thriving Kids works for the community that they are in. Did I understand that properly?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

J DAVIS: Is there any overall strategy regarding Thriving Kids, understanding that it goes across different departments, to make sure that it will work to achieve its goals?

Mrs HERSEY: That is probably not a question for us, but it is still in the consultation phase. That sits with Minister Charls and with Health.

J DAVIS: Do you have any estimate of how many additional teachers and early childhood educators, as well as allied health staff, would be required to implement Thriving Kids?

Mrs HERSEY: That will sit with the consultation that is happening at the moment, and it will come out when it is finalised.

Mr BROWN: How will progress against Thriving Kids outcomes for children aged between zero and five years be measured and reported publicly?

Mrs HERSEY: As I have stated, this is still in consultation. It mainly sits with Minister Charls and would be a question for him.

Mr CHAIR: I note and welcome the public sector management program which has joined us in the gallery. Thank you for coming today.

Mr MACKAY: In relation to the early childhood centres and improvement in safety, how many site visits have department staff undertaken across the Northern Territory? If you have a regional breakdown that would be great.

Mrs HERSEY: In the 2025 calendar year, 1 January to December, QECNT had 317 visits, visiting all services, some multiple times. QECNT received 2,333 notifications. Do you want the breakdown?

Mr MACKAY: Yes.

Mrs HERSEY: They included 822 incidents and 209 complaints, of which 120 were reported by the approved provider and 89 directly to QECNT. There were 13 formal investigations commenced, with nine completed.

Mr MACKAY: In terms of reporting up the chain—pardon my ignorance—if a child at a childcare centre breaks their leg, does the department get notified? Is there an incident level that gets notified through to the department for early child centres the same way that schools notify up?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes, all incidents get reported through QECNT to the department and me as minister.

Mr MACKAY: Say, another child bites my child, is that a reportable incident or is it if they get a scratch? Kids fall and kids play. What is the level of incident which gets reported up the chain?

Mrs HERSEY: I get reports of all those incidents that you spoke about.

Mr MACKAY: Of all the early childcare centres in the Northern Territory, how many of those are outside of the Stuart Highway band of major urban centres? How many are in the remote and regional areas that are not necessarily Darwin, Katherine, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek?

Mrs HERSEY: It is broken down by region as well. In Darwin there are 18 government preschools, four outside-school-hours care services, two FaFT services—25 altogether. In Arnhem—do you want me to just do the remote ones or you want all of them?

Mr MACKAY: The non-urban ones.

Mrs HERSEY: In Arnhem there are nine government preschools; four in scope with NQF. There are four government preschools out of scope of NQF. There are eight FaFT groups and two Connected Beginnings.

In the Top End there are 19 government preschools; four outside school hours care; nine government preschools out of scope; two long day cares; eight FaFTs; five FaFT Stay, Play, Learn; and three child and family centres.

In Big Rivers there are 13 government preschools; 11 out of scope of NQF; one long day care with the outside school hours; one long day care; two long day care with school councils with CCCFR out of scope, which is federal funding; nine FaFT; four Stay, Play, Learn FaFT; and one child and family centre.

In the Barkly there are four government preschools; one government preschool out of scope of the NQF; six FaFT; two FaFT Stay, Play, Learn; and one Connected Beginnings.

In Central there are 13 government preschools; 12 government preschools out of scope of NQF; and one long day care centre; four FaFT centres; five FaFT Stay, Play Learn; and two child and family centres.

Mr MACKAY: That is all my questions on this output.

Mrs ZIO: Can you advise the committee what makes an early childhood provider out of scope for the National Quality Framework?

Mrs HERSEY: Those out of scope centres—I am clarifying that—are the ones that are under that CCCFR funding, which is federal funding. They do not fall under the same standards. For example, Na-Wulg-Wulg

creche in Katherine is a CCCFR centre. Potentially it could be under the NQF standards. It is a good centre and is well attended.

What was the other part of your question, sorry?

Mrs ZIO: It was about what made an organisation in or out of scope for the National Quality Framework.

Mrs HERSEY: Yes. If there are under six students in that centre—in the preschools and early learning centres.

Mrs ZIO: It helps to get an understanding of that. I have only just come in, so if you have already answered this in your opening statement I apologise. How many staff sit in the QECNT team to help assist with the work they are doing to improve outcomes?

Mrs HERSEY: There is an extra five we put on through the Safe Start, Strong Futures program. There are 14 authorised officers overall.

Mr YOUNG: I have a follow-up question in regard to the National Quality Framework and the recent reforms done in that space. It is off the back of the Member for Goyder. You spoke of some of those compliance concerns with a number of childcare centres. How many of those have been prosecuted?

Mrs HERSEY: There is one prosecution at the moment, Member for Daly.

Mr YOUNG: Was that within this reporting period?

Mrs HERSEY: Because it is before the court, we will not be ...

Mr YOUNG: Yes, I am not asking for the details, but was it only one within the reporting period?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output Group 1.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – GOVERNMENT EDUCATION **Output 2.1 – Preschool Education**

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 2, Government Education, Output 2.1, Preschool Education. Are there any questions?

Mr BROWN: Are you aware that Milikapiti School in my electorate has had approximately 11 principal changes in the last two years?

Mrs HERSEY: I do not think that is 2.1. Are we in Output 2?

Mr CHAIR: We are in Output Group 2, Government Education, Output 2.1, Preschool Education. I am not aware of this school or if it falls into it.

Mrs HERSEY: It is not a preschool.

Mr BROWN: It has all levels of schooling. It includes a preschool.

Mrs HERSEY: It is under 2.2, I think.

Mr CHAIR: Shadow minister, we will place that question at 2.2.

J DAVIS: Under which output would I ask about bilingual education?

Mrs HERSEY: Output 2.2.

Mr MACKAY: Minister, how many students enrolled in preschool across the Northern Territory, and what is the preschool attendance rate?

Mrs HERSEY: The total preschool enrolments are 2,800, and attendance is 87% by non-Aboriginal students and 51% by Aboriginal students.

Mr MACKAY: Is that 2,800 number up or down from the previous reporting period, or has the number of students increased or decreased on the previous period?

Mrs HERSEY: The number I gave you was in the reporting period going into the—sorry, that was the projection of what they were. The actual was 2,746 number. You want the comparison with the previous year; is that correct?

Mr MACKAY: If that was the number for January or February this year, then what was previous? Is the number of preschoolers coming through the Territory's education system increasing or decreasing year on year?

Mrs HERSEY: In actual fact, the enrolments were not met by 54 for that number there, against the key performance indicators; which was the 2,800 that I gave you first, so 2,746 was the actual number.

The NT's estimated resident population of children aged nought to five has actually decreased by 9.1%—so we just need more people to have babies ...

Mr CHAIR: I am helping, minister.

Mrs HERSEY: The NT's population between June 2017 and June 2025 gives you that decrease.

That is just in preschool enrolment and attendance, but it is also not compulsory either. Some families may choose an early childcare setting as opposed to going to preschool because they still get an education there, with a teacher in those early childcare settings if they have one.

Mr MACKAY: How many reportable incidents occurred in preschools during the reporting period?

Mrs HERSEY: The number that I gave out before, which was the 822 incidents, does not break down where they are occurring—whether it is an early childcare setting, preschool or primary school.

I am happy to take that on notice if you want.

Question on Notice No 7.10

Mr CHAIR: Member for Goyder, please restate the question for the record.

Mr MACKAY: Can you provide a breakdown of the number of incidents by category of early childhood centre, preschool, primary school and secondary school, as appropriate?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs HERSEY: Sure.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.10.

Mr CHAIR: I have a question on the associated costs with preschool education. Do we have an average cost that an NT family would be facing with a year at preschool? Is it subsidised at all federally? How does the money for preschool work?

Mrs HERSEY: I was just checking on the over and above. The 15 hours of preschool is free. There are some centres that have contributions people may choose to pay, but government education is essentially free.

Mr YOUNG: Is that 15 hours' free preschool a federal government initiative or a Northern Territory Government initiative?

Mrs HERSEY: Under government education it is free, but that all comes under the Preschool Reform Agreement—which I think is actually under review again at the moment.

Mr YOUNG: That did not state whether it is federal or ...

Mrs HERSEY: The Preschool Reform Agreement is federal.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.1.

Output 2.2 – Primary Years Education

Mr CHAIR: I will now call for questions on Output 2.2, Primary Years Education. Are there any questions?

Mr BROWN: Are you aware that Milikapiti School has had approximately 11 principals go through it in the last two years. What are you and your department doing to improve retention in remote areas?

Mrs HERSEY: We ensure that we put in all the necessary supports to retain and attract teachers to remote and very remote centres. There are a number of things that our department does to attract and retain teachers. I will refer this to the Deputy Chief Executive, Paul van Holsteyn, to elaborate.

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: I acknowledge that Milikapiti School has had a range of short-term principals. The principal was on personal leave for a period of time so that makes it challenging to back fill. I am delighted to confirm that as of March this year we have successfully recruited a permanent principal to that school. I expect that some of the challenge around the change over of leavers will be resolved. Milikapiti's teaching staff has remained largely stable, so despite the leadership turnover we have had a good group of teachers that have the connection and relationships with the community to drive improving outcomes for the young people in that community.

Your question went more broadly to some of the work that we are doing to attract and retain teachers and leaders. In the 2026–27 Budget we have allocated \$14.6m for keeping and attracting teachers. That is the total amount for a range of attraction and retention measures. Some of the things that fit within this budget line are things like our enhanced recruitment strategies. We talked earlier about the additional support we have provided schools through the recruitment processes. It also looks at teacher pipeline initiatives. We have things like the Accelerated Classroom Teacher Practice Program, and we have a partnership with Teach for Australia. This is about bringing our skilled professionals into the teaching profession.

We have launched two scholarships this year to support people through their pre-service education to become teachers. There is the Teach Local Scholarship which we are offering \$5,000 per year to NT residents to study in an initial teacher education degree at Charles Darwin University, also the Teach Up North Incentive Program, which is about bringing interstate pre-service teachers to do a practicum placement in the Territory and then if they stay in the Territory that scholarship is paid as their retention.

We have done a lot of work to streamline our principal recruitment processes and looking at bulk recruitment where possible. We have talked about the RATE program and reducing administrative burden and also a strong focus on staff wellbeing and safety is also part of the work that we are doing to be able to attract but also to retain teachers in the Northern Territory Education and Training.

Mrs HERSEY: I want to add to that, Chair. We do a lot to attract and retain teachers here. We only have 33 classroom teacher positions vacant compared with 51 at the same time last year, that is at 31 March 2026, and at that same time we have five principal positions advertised compared with 11 positions at the same time last year, which goes to the Member for Arafura's question at the start.

As the Deputy CE spoke about, out of 15 of those scholarships of \$5,000, 10 offers have been accepted and six are already employed in student support roles in schools. That gives them fantastic experience and the Teach Up North which is 25 of the \$5,000 incentives to attract interstate initial teachers and education students to undertake a per-service placement in the NT. We have had 32 applications for the 25 scholarships. That is fantastic. There are a lot of people from down south. Why would you not want to come to this place where we have an amazing lifestyle and such great outdoor areas? When I have been in regional and remote areas I have spoken to many teachers from down south who have come to the Territory to teach.

As Paul spoke about, with the TFA (Teach for Australia) teachers and the RATE program—I spoke of that earlier, where and we have a considerable number, nearly three times the amount, of teachers who have taken up that program. That is fantastic.

Mr CHAIR: I have a quick follow-on from the Member for Arafura's question because that situation could hypothetically apply to any school, but I will not go into a hypothetical. If a senior staff member like a principal

goes on personal leave, and we understand a range of measures could have caused that, does that mean you cannot hire into that position?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: It does not mean we cannot hire into the position. Part of the challenge is that often with medical circumstances we do not know exactly how long it will last. We might be able to bring someone in for a period of time and then they may have other commitments, because we cannot fill that position on an ongoing basis. Wherever possible, we look within the school to see if there is someone with experience and leadership potential to step into the principal role because then we have that continuity in the school.

In the Milikapiti example, that was part of the solution, and then looking at how we could fly in support from outside the school to help support that acting principal and growing their capability.

We also have a group of either retired principals or system leaders who have significant experience who might not want to have an ongoing role, but we very happily bring them back in situations like this because they have that experience that they can lead for a period of time, but it is obviously not their desire to work full-time. There is a range of measures we can employ.

In all those situations it is also about wrapping support around that school because someone stepping into the leadership role will not have the full context and the full understanding that the ongoing principal of the school has. It is really about how we can ensure from the region, from our school operations team, from our finance team and from our student wellbeing inclusion team how we can make sure that principal gets the support they need so that the school continues to improve outcomes for those children while that leadership position ...

Mr CHAIR: The person in that full-time position is not acting in the role—do you have the ability to make the executive decision and say, ‘We will permanently fill that position now’?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: We have to respect and acknowledge the rights to the person who owns that position; that is their role. We cannot replace them in that sense. That is part of our industrial obligations to the employee. Through negotiation with the person, we have had situations where someone has acknowledged that the time is not right for them to return to the principalship in that school, and then we work with them to support with leave and they will relinquish that position for us to fill it otherwise.

Mr CHAIR: I am assuming that current condition—is that a request or a condition set by the union, in that you will get to hold your position even if you are not there at work?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: It is a part of our industrial framework, and I note you have got the commissioner appearing this afternoon and who might be able to take that question with more information.

The CE can direct employees to move school locations. I think it is just something that we need to consider in terms of we want that staff member to get better. Sometimes we do not know the timeframes that will take. We would not want to be in a situation where an action that we undertook would impede their recovery by being replaced in a school. It is a difficult balance that we need to manage.

Mr CHAIR: I understand that. Coming to the example that was given, my concern is that we have conditions in the industrial relations agreement that are not beneficial for the students.

Mr BROWN: I am going to the swimming pool voucher program, just to give you an overview. There have been multiple reports of schools travelling hundreds of kilometres just to participate in the program. For example, students from Alpururulam have travelled 655 kilometres to the Devils Marbles Hotel for swimming lessons. The Amanbidji school travelled to Kununurra. Can you walk me through how the swimming voucher scheme is currently working for the schools?

Mrs HERSEY: The Swimming in Schools program was an election commitment that we brought in last year. It had a significant amount of students that took part in it. This was \$3m for the free Swimming in Schools program. I have spoken regarding the swimming school program numerous times.

Schools can liaise with the School of Sport and book into its swimming programs. Also, when they do excursions, all schools—last year, there were four schools that all came together and went to Tennant Creek. There have been schools come into Darwin and stay at the Michael Long Centre and do their swimming lessons when they come on an excursion, for example to Parliament House. Ramingining was one school that did that this year.

There have been 130 of the 133 government schools in scope that have completed the Swim and Survive program. There have been 17,899 students who have participated in the program—13,453 government school students and 4,446 non-government school students participated.

What was the other part of your question?

Mr BROWN: Can you walk me through how the swimming voucher scheme is currently working for bush schools?

Mrs HERSEY: The swimming voucher works for bush schools the same way that it works for town schools. Each student gets \$150 towards their swimming program. Many bush schools have used that. I am not sure how many of those remote schools—there are ones which have not participated at the moment—Yipirinya School, Tiwi College, Living Waters Lutheran College, Yirrkala College and the Nawarddeken Academy.

If those schools are having difficulties in accessing the program and coming into town, they can liaise with the School of Sport which can do all the organising for them and help them be supported to come into town. They can stay at the Michael Long Centre, as we have seen previously. This is a great lifestyle piece. It makes sure that kids can swim and save themselves. We have plenty of lakes, rivers and dams across the Territory, so it is important that kids learn to swim.

When I was in opposition, I thought this was something that everybody did, because in Katherine we have done the Swim and Survive program ever since I was a teacher, 30-plus years ago. My kids have all done it through the school, and it is something that we brought to the election as a commitment. All schools are encouraged to participate in it, but if they are having difficulty in organising it they can get in contact with the School of Sport to be better supported.

Mr CHAIR: We will break now for five minutes.

The committee suspended.

Madam DEPUTY CHAIR: We will continue with the Member for Arafura.

Mr BROWN: How much time are remote students spending outside of the classroom to travel big distances for swimming lessons?

Mrs HERSEY: We do not measure that at the department. Obviously, remote students have to come in. I have spoken of this many times. I know that Maningrida has a pool. I was talking to Ramingining which travels—I think the principal says it is an hour she travels on the bus to Maningrida to do their swimming lessons.

It is about those remote schools adding it into their excursion and, potentially, coming into town, which is what we see many do. As I said before, there were those four schools that went into Tennant Creek last year. All of the School of the Air children come into Katherine in their in-school week and do their swimming. It is up to those schools to plan their year and swimming. All schools have plans. They plan those excursions in. That is when they can also seek help through the school sports to help organise for their swimming lessons.

Mr BROWN: Some schools are reporting that they have to use hotel pools for swimming lessons. Is that true? If so, who is responsible for the risk and liability of the pool used?

Mrs HERSEY: I know that there are some remote schools that do not have to use, as you suggested, hotel pools. In Mataranka they used The Manor pool. I know of some other ones—I just cannot think of some others off the top of my head at the moment—have used hotel pools or pools at other accommodation. I know when we did not have a pool in Katherine, for example, the Discovery Park was obliging in letting them use that pool.

Royal Life are also the providers that teach swimming. They would have the appropriate approvals and insurances and everything that would need to be covered.

Mr BROWN: The provider would take care of the risk and liability?

Mrs HERSEY: The responsibility of the children would be with the school, but as I just said, the Royal Life has all of the insurances and things like that for their teachers. I am not sure if Tony, the Deputy Chief Executive, might want to elaborate on that a little more.

Mr CONSIDINE: It is probably three layers of risk. The three layers of risk is that generally if we are using someone else's pool or something like that, they have their own liability experience. That would be the same with any public venue. They have their own public liability insurance. There are some locations, if we are using, that might require an indemnity for us. If that is the case, we put them in place.

Second, the level of risk is for the event itself, so when there is an excursion—I think my colleague Paul referred to the work we do around making sure we can have excursions planned for swimming—within those there is a risk assessment. That risk assessment goes right across the pool and the context of that pool. That gives us a risk assessment to make sure we manage risk. The department manages the risk; there are teachers there who act in loco parentis and they take risk in that circumstance.

Last, the minister talked about where we worked with providers, and we work with multiple providers who are swimming coaches, they also have a degree of liability and they have insurance for that.

There are multiple layers that we manage in all those situations, but we take it very seriously and a risk assessment is done for any excursions we are undertaking that swimming.

Mr BROWN: Some schools are coming in from islands and have to travel significant distances away from their community to access a pool. Staff, fuel, accommodation and all that—who covers the costs?

Mrs HERSEY: Schools will get the funding for the child to cover for the swimming, but if there are schools out there—I have said this to you many times; we have had this conversation—that are finding financial difficulty in coming in, then they need to get in contact with the department and seek additional funding. It is up to the school. If the school does not ask, the department does not know that they do not have the money there to provide the program.

Mr BROWN: Have many schools been asking for additional funding for this program to happen? Do you have the numbers?

Mrs HERSEY: The only school that asked for additional funding was Wagaman Primary School. Of the schools that you have ever reported to me who are saying that they are finding it financially difficult to provide swimming lessons or cannot get in, none have ever been in contact. I have asked you to pass on that detail, and I have never seen that detail.

Mr BROWN: Just to wrap it up, to access this program a school must come in to do an excursion. What about those that do not have the opportunity to come into bigger hubs for an excursion—places like Warruwi and Minjilang? Is there a chance of the program or funding getting reallocated to something that they can use if they cannot have access?

Mrs HERSEY: The funding is for the Swimming in Schools program. As I have stated, schools can access extra funding. For example, if Warruwi chose to come on an excursion into town and they stayed at the Michael Long Centre—I do not know what the costs would be—they could apply for extra support to run the program. There were not many schools that did not do—what Tony has just said is we do not ask the schools to acquit that funding that they get. All schools get funding for the swimming program, whether they use it or not.

Tony will elaborate on the financials of it.

Mr CONSIDINE: Schools have a global budget, and on top of that they get an allocation for their swimming program. They allocate their money to their swimming program. Some schools may not utilise all the money on the swimming program. We do not then go back to them and say, 'You did not use \$300 of that program and have to give it back to us'. That stays with the school.

It also works the other way. We have a hardship provision where if a school comes to us saying that it is in a situation and cannot afford a full swimming program, we are able to provide additional funding. But that operates within the global school budget of that school. If it was moving toward the outside of that budget, that is when the assistance kicks in. That means there is equity for schools in terms of delivery of that program.

Mr YOUNG: I have one follow-up, as I picked up that you said that there is an overall global budget, and then there is additional funding for the swimming program itself, which is \$150 per student. That is obviously based on the school's data in terms of how many students are enrolled at the school. You mentioned—I think I heard you say and just want clarity. any schools had to dip into their global school budget to be able to provide the swimming program?

Mrs HERSEY: No. Schools do not use their own budgets for that. Tony may want to elaborate further on that. Like I said, they get funded for the swimming program and if they find hardship or anything; then they can ask for extra assistance—which has certainly been given to only one school who asked, and that was a school in Darwin.

What I will just say, to both of you, is if you have schools in your area—certainly the Member for Arafura—that need extra financial assistance; they need to make the department aware.

Mr CHAIR: Just a quick follow-up on using the swimming program. Does that extend to, say, if a teacher buys goggles or swimmers for a student? Can they be reimbursed or not?

Mrs HERSEY: No. I do know that there is—as the Deputy CEO Tony Considine has said, schools do not have to equip that budget. Potentially, they could—maybe purchase goggles if they have money left over or something like that. But no, they do not get reimbursed. The budget for the swimming program is what they get. Remote schools can certainly ask for better and more support if they need it.

J DAVIS: Minister, on behalf of the Member for Mulka, will the bilingual-targeted funding continue next year? How much is this funding?

Mrs HERSEY: Thank you, Member for Johnston, in the Member for Mulka's absence. The bilingual education is \$3.64m in the 2026 calendar budget. That includes \$3.28m for schools, and \$0.36m to provide centrally based bilingual education support to the nine bilingual schools.

Those bilingual schools—I have spoken about this in parliament before. There has certainly been—I think Shepherdson; I went to their celebration. We have also been to—there was a couple that we have been to for huge 50-year celebrations of the bilingual schools. For the life of me I cannot think of them off the top of my head. Maybe somebody sitting beside me might—Yuendumu was the other one.

This comes up often. We are not scrapping bilingual education. We have 2,109 students enrolled over those nine schools, which was an increase of 67 students. In the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, all those schools get a considerable amount of money extra. There is an expectation for them to employ engagement officers and to make sure that their students are going to school because there is a considerable amount of those schools that are very poor in attendance, like 20%, 30% or 40%.

J DAVIS: The question specifically related to bilingual education funding.

Mrs HERSEY: That is all about bilingual.

J DAVIS: I have the second question on behalf of the Member for Mulka. Last year, the Member for Mulka raised a question of whether Year 1 children of bilingual schools undertake the Year 1 phonics testing in their first language. He also asked about the NAPLAN testing. Since then, the Member for Mulka has corresponded with the federal Education minister, Minister Clare, who stated that the Commonwealth department would work with the NT department to address these issues. Could you advise what the current policy is for the Year 1 phonics test and NAPLAN tests Year 3 and Year 5 in bilingual schools?

Mrs HERSEY: At the end of semester 1 2025, students were monitored because beginning level 1 reading for the NT EALD learning progressions were not required to be assessed. These students have yet to develop the foundational understanding for English print literacy skills to participate successfully. That answers your question.

J DAVIS: To clarify—the current policy is that they are assessed as to whether they are able to do that Year 1 phonics test, and if not, they do not do it.

Mrs HERSEY: When those children get to the basic standard then they will do the phonics test but not regarding what you are asking. You said Year 1.

J DAVIS: The question I have is Year 1 phonics test and NAPLAN Year 3 and Year 5.

Mrs HERSEY: The answer I have given you is only in relation to Year 1. In Years 3 and 5, they would be doing the NAPLAN in English.

J DAVIS: For students in bilingual schools who often do not start to write in English until Year 4, is there any intent to revisit the policy on that?

Mrs HERSEY: The bilingual schools have team teachers where they do English and their own language. There is an expectation that when they go to school that they learn both. They would be starting to learn that when they first go to school. There is an allowance for those younger students but by the time they get to Years 3 and 5 and doing NAPLAN, they would be doing it in English.

Extra to that, Tony Considine has said that there is a requirement by the Australian Government for the NAPLAN to be done.

Tony might like to elaborate a bit further.

Mr CONSIDINE: The Australian Government requires children to undertake the NAPLAN testing and schools to administer that. There are some exclusions that can happen based on a parent not wanting a child to do it, but they must provide information to that effect; it cannot be a school making that decision. Schools are required to administer the NAPLAN test as part of our overall funding agreements.

J DAVIS: Eleven schools in the Territory are almost all Kriol speaking and seven have a significant Kriol population. It is the second-most spoken language in the Northern Territory after English. How much funding does the department put towards Kriol-specific resources? What specific training and support is given to non-Kriol-speaking staff tasked with teaching in the dozens of classrooms where students all speak Kriol as a first language?

Mrs HERSEY: There is money is allocated in the budget for schools supporting Aboriginal languages. All schools may teach Aboriginal languages using the Northern Territory Indigenous Languages and Cultures Curriculum. During the 2025 school year, 4,636 students received an A to E grade for Indigenous languages and cultures in 51 schools across 33 identified languages. Additional languages were recorded as 'other', which is an increase of 442 students and three schools.

J DAVIS: My question was: what Kriol-specific resources are there—given the number of Kriol-speaking students—for both the students and the teachers working with those students?

Mrs HERSEY: I think I have already answered that. There is \$0.595m for supporting Aboriginal languages. There are 51 schools across 33 identified languages; it can fit in there. We are not specifically saying it is Warlpiri, Kriol or whatever; it fits in those additional languages.

Mr MACKAY: With the schools that are engaging in bilingual education, is there any evidence to suggest that offering bilingual education improves attendance rates?

Mrs HERSEY: If I have a look at the attendance rates in those schools that do bilingual education, even the school that I went out to and celebrated 50 years of bilingual education, on that particular day there was 33% of the children there at that school, so, no, in short, I do not think it does not add to getting those children to school. You would potentially think it would, but we as a government are not cutting bilingual education money just because—we are certainly looking at those correlations, but we are not cutting any money to those bilingual programs.

As I said, under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement those schools get a considerable amount of extra funding. There is an expectation that they would employ engagement officers and work within their communities to make sure that they are getting extra students to school.

Mr MACKAY: Is there any evidence to suggest that bilingual education improves educational outcomes for the department tracks in a measurable statistic?

Mrs HERSEY: In 2025 some of the children who do their NTCET, certainly in remote areas, can use Aboriginal languages to get them through their NTCET—whether it be with VET certificates or whatever—and there were 16 students enrolled in VET certificates for Aboriginal languages in government schools. Three of those students were enrolled in Stage 1 Australian Languages – First Language in non-government schools.

Mr MACKAY: Sorry, minister, still on primary education. Are there no metrics that the department tracks to show positive outcomes for educational outputs in primary years, be it NAPLAN results or whatever testing is available for primary years bilingual education?

Mrs HERSEY: No. It is only when they get to high school.

Mr CHAIR: I welcome to the gallery the Public Sector Management Program, the second group through today. Welcome, and thank you for being here.

J DAVIS: There is substantial evidence that bilingual education contributes to literacy, numeracy and ongoing educational things.

Mr CHAIR: Everyone on the committee, we all have our views on that. As a linguist, I have views on that, but will not get into them. We will go straight to a question.

J DAVIS: I will move on. Following up with some questions I was asking in the opening statement in relation to students with disability, I was interested in the attendance rates and suspension rates for students with disability, but in the interest of time I will move on from that, and I can put that in as a written question.

Mrs HERSEY: I have an answer for you. We do not publicly report suspension data by disability.

J DAVIS: Okay, thank you; that saves me some time.

The Commonwealth pays the NT for every student identified through the NCCD; is that correct?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

J DAVIS: For students who are not attending for whatever reason, does the NT still receive Commonwealth funding for those students?

Mrs HERSEY: The school resourcing in the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD), for school students with a disability, they must be there for the collection of that information on the students who receive the adjustments to access that education. They must be there when that collection of data takes place. They have to be at school for the collection of data.

J DAVIS: If they are absent on that day, does that mean that the money does not come to the Territory from the NCCD?

Mr CONSIDINE: The answer has two parts. If a student is not here for August census, then they are not picked up in the NCCD funding; however, we receive other funding that helps engage those students. It comes to us through a couple of Commonwealth programs through NTRAI and through CASP programs. They assist us to re-engage students.

J DAVIS: Do you have any quantification of how many students—we would be getting funding under NCCD—we are not getting funding for because they are absent on that census day?

Mrs HERSEY: I will hand over to Paul van Holsteyn.

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: There a few pieces to make a point here. The funding from the Australian Government to the Territory is based on the age grade census. The age grade census is not a day; it is a four-week reference period. Already then, we are capturing the greater number of students. To be funded through the age grade census students do not need to be attending on that day. They need to be enrolled—have an active enrolment in a school. With that in mind, it is a much broader capture than I think the conversation has been going to so far.

With regard to the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on school students with disability, the funding that comes from that collection, there are some requirements around 10 weeks of adjustments and evidence of 10 weeks of adjustment that a school has provided. That is an Australian Government metric, not our metric, and there are some other tests that need to be in place to include a student on the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on school students with disability.

J DAVIS: The reason for my question is to make sure that the Territory is getting the money that we should be getting for those students, and we are not missing out on it. I am still not totally sure—we might be missing a bit of it; is that right?

Mr VAN HOLSTEYN: We are funded under Australian Government requirements. If we are meeting the requirements through the census reference period, and we have 10 weeks of adjustments across the 12-month period of the year, those students can be included under the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data.

J DAVIS: I want to come back to my question about Kriol. When I asked that question one of my committee members said that Kriol is not an Aboriginal language; it is broken English. I want to check with you whether you believe Kriol is an Aboriginal language?

Mrs HERSEY: It is in the department and in the funding. I am aware that it is broken English and it is spoken a lot around where I live in Katherine, but it is captured under the Aboriginal languages, which I stated before.

J DAVIS: To be clear, is the department's position that Kriol is an Aboriginal language?

Mrs HERSEY: We do not have a position on it, but it is a spoken language that happens in community. In Ngukurr, for example, there is a lot of Kriol. They write books in Kriol. There are a lot of things that they have that they write in Kriol. I have received books from different people that are written in Kriol. We do not have a position on that as a department. That is more in the jurisdiction, but is captured under Aboriginal languages.

Mr MACKAY: Earlier you talked about the number of teacher vacancies. How many of those teacher vacancies are for primary education frontline teachers?

Mrs HERSEY: We do not have a breakdown specifically. Deputy CE Paul will do that, so maybe we can have another question and come back to it. On the vacancies, there were 33 classroom teacher positions as opposed to 51 last year. There are 20 as at 3 June 2026.

Mr MACKAY: Does the department meet the recruitment cost for those schools or does the school meet the cost? Who pays for the recruiting for a teacher for a school?

Mrs HERSEY: The schools pay for that recruitment.

Mr MACKAY: Is there any extra funding that can be tapped into; for example, with the new Palmerston special education school that is being developed in 2029. Will there be a year's worth of funding provided by the department before that school is established to be able to recruit suitably qualified people?

Mrs HERSEY: That work will happen in that year prior to that school coming online to make sure—if we go back to when Henbury was built there was a principal online there for six to 12 months before working with that school. That would happen in lead-up to the Palmerston secondary special school as well.

Mr MACKAY: Sticking with Output 2.2, are there any department-specific programs or funding for English as a Second Language students to provide that extra support? When I was at primary school we had an English as a Second Language class for helping people with migrant backgrounds with English—my friends. Is there any specific program or funding for supporting English as a Second Language students by the department?

Mrs HERSEY: There is. Schools receive funding through the English as additional language through the SOS ...

Mr MACKAY: A new way of saying yes.

Mrs HERSEY: The funding is based on the learning progress of those learners at the age-grade census. What was the other part of your question, sorry?

Mr MACKAY: The specific programs or funding for schools for teaching English as a Second Language classes.

Mrs HERSEY: There are intensive English units provided to students who have recently arrived in Australia—which is what you are talking about—and learning English as an additional language. That program is \$3.2m

in the intensive English unit. There are four schools in Darwin that run intensive English programs, being Anula, Moil, Sanderson and Darwin High. In the primary school—we are in the primary output—there is Anula Primary and Moil Primary Schools.

Mr MACKAY: Middle Point School in my electorate has a high proportion of Vietnamese background students. They get no additional support for English as a Second Language for that primary school?

Mr BROWN: Chair, in the interest of time, could we ...

Mr MACKAY: My last one on this and then I will leave it alone.

Mr BROWN: ... get that in a brief or something?

Mr CHAIR: No, no. Members can put questions to the minister, especially considering—I will let the minister answer and then we will be going through other members. We will be moving on shortly.

Mrs HERSEY: They may be migrant families but not necessarily new migrant families to that school. They can also get English as an additional language funding through their funding stream, but not specifically. They are not one of the ones that is captured for migrants, no.

Mr MACKAY: You can take the next question on notice. Can I get a breakdown across the Territory by region and year level of primary school attendance? Just for the Term 1, just Year 1 remote, regional, urban—by Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, Year 5 and Year 6.

Mrs HERSEY: Sure.

Question on Notice No 7.11

Mr CHAIR: Member for Goyder, please restate the question for the record.

Mr MACKAY: Can I get a breakdown of attendance by year level of primary school, via a regional, remote and urban breakdown?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs HERSEY: Sure.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.11.

Mrs HERSEY: I have some questions taken on notice that I can table, Chair. They are questions on notice 7.5, 7.8 and 7.9. I table them.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.2.

Output 2.3 – Secondary Years Education

Mr CHAIR: We will now consider Output 2.3, Secondary Years Education.

Are there any questions? Shadow minister.

Mr BROWN: We are happy to send the questions on notice. We are done with Education for the day.

Mr MACKAY: Do we have an understanding of the students who achieved an ATAR in the reporting period, what the average ATAR achieved across the Territory was? That is for public schools.

Mrs HERSEY: Member for Goyder, we have the number for NTCET completions, but we do not necessarily have that breakdown of what you are asking.

Mr MACKAY: Does the department keep a record of all the ATARs that are achieved in a year? Is that data that I can ask for on notice?

Mrs HERSEY: No, the department does not get visibility of that.

Mr MACKAY: Of the students that achieved their NTCET, how many would have also gone on to achieve an ATAR? How many on an academic pathway, rather than a certificate pathway or another way of achieving the NTCET?

Mrs HERSEY: We might need to take that on notice as well. We have the NTCET completers, but not that specific.

Question on Notice No 7.12

Mr CHAIR: Member for Goyder, please restate the question for the record.

Mr MACKAY: Can I have a breakdown of what percentage of students achieving their NTCET in the reporting period would have also been granted an ATAR score?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs HERSEY: I do.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.12.

Mr MACKAY: Is there any money in this year's budget for secondary education looking at the long-term planning for a new rural high school in the greater Darwin rural area?

Mrs HERSEY: In short, no. Obviously as a government we forecast new suburbs coming online. I know there is a lot of growth in the rural area. Specifically, no, but the department is always looking to see where those growth areas are to plan for the future—in short.

Mr MACKAY: With secondary students, do we have an understanding what percentage of students make it to Year 7 who then will continue all the way through to Year 12? What percentage finish in Year 10? If you start Year 7, how likely are you to get to Year 10 before you drop out versus Year 12? What percentage makes it all the way to Year 12, how many to Year 10 or leave halfway through?

Mrs HERSEY: With the merging back into comprehensive schools, more of that data will be captured. We have the NTCET attainment rate for government schools. For non-Aboriginal students, it was 84%, down by one percentage point. For Aboriginal students, it was 42%, up by six percentage points, which is good. The NT Government total who attained their NTCET was 72%, which was an increase of five percentage points overall, which was great.

With the move into comprehensive schools, the department will be capturing more of that granular data that you are asking for regarding, if they go from Year 7, whether they drop out at Year 10, 11 or 12.

Mr MACKAY: In the reporting period or appropriate period, how many students start Year 12 and do not complete Year 12? They drop out within that year.

Mrs HERSEY: Given the information that I just gave you and the NT Government total is 72%, potentially 28% would have dropped out.

Mr MACKAY: As in, left school during that period? Or they just got to the end of it and did not achieve the required marks?

Mrs HERSEY: They did not achieve their NTCET.

Mr MACKAY: Can I get the percentage of who would have dropped out, no longer be attending school and/or found an alternative pathway?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Question on Notice No 7.13

Mr CHAIR: Member for Goyder, please restate the question for the record.

Mr MACKAY: Can you provide the number of students who began Year 12 in the reporting period and then failed to complete it by no longer attending school by the end of it?

Mr CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Mrs HERSEY: Yes.

Mr CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 7.13.

Answer to Question on Notice No 7.4

Mrs HERSEY: I table an answer to question on notice 7.4.

Answer to Question on Notice No 7.5

Mrs HERSEY: I also have an answer to question on notice 7.5, which was: how many students as a percentage of enrolment would fall into the 60% to 80% attendance category? In 2025, 15% of students fell into that category.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.3.

Output 2.4 – International Education

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 2.4, International Education. While the Minister for Education and Training is responsible for the delivery of education services to international students in NT Government schools, I note that questions relating to International Education and training strategy should be directed to the Minister for International Education, Migration and Population when she appears before the committee this afternoon.

Are there any questions?

Mr MACKAY: How many international students are in NT Government schools?

Mrs HERSEY: We had 214 students in April 2026 who are full fee-paying students. Forty-one of those are on student-specific fee-paying visas and 173 are on other fee-paying visas. We also have 2,595 students on visas that do not attract fees.

Mr CHAIR: Are there any further questions on Output 2.4 and Output Group 2? That concludes consideration of Output 2.4 and Output Group 2.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – NON-GOVERNMENT EDUCATION
Output 3.1 – Primary and Secondary Years Education

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move on to Output Group, Non-government Education, Output 3.1, Primary and Secondary Years Education. Are there any questions?

Mr MACKAY: Does the department have any visibility into the number of students who start Year 12 and then drop out for a non-government school? Does it provide the information to the department in any form that this is no longer a student attending?

Mrs HERSEY: In short, no.

Mr MACKAY: I know we do not collect ATARs. Is there any way of tracking the difference in educational outcomes? Does the department compare the NAPLAN results, for example, between the independent schools, the Catholic and Christian schools and then the NT Government schools and does a comparison for the greater Darwin region, Katherine, Alice Springs or anywhere?

Mrs HERSEY: I will hand to Tony Considine, Deputy Chief Executive.

Mr CONSIDINE: In this case, information from non-government schools is recorded on the My Schools website and is available independently for schools on the My Schools website. We do not have bulk access, nor would we do a comparison between government and non-government schools in that regard.

Independent comparisons can be made through an upcycling through the My Schools website.

Mr MACKAY: Does the department have any understanding of the vacancies in the non-government schools?

Answer to Question on Notice No 7.12

Mrs HERSEY: Sorry, I was looking at the answer to question 7.12, which was on notice. The answer is 47% of NTCET recipients got an ATAR in government schools, which I think you asked, Member for Goyder.

Mrs HERSEY: What was your question, Member for Goyder?

Mr MACKAY: Was there any visibility into the number of teaching vacancies in non-government schools in the Northern Territory?

Mrs HERSEY: No, we do not have visibility of that.

Mr MACKAY: Does the department have any visibility or understanding of whether non-government teachers are paid more than government teachers? Is it a competing market or is it a similar market?

Mrs HERSEY: Anecdotally, you could say it is a competing market. I hear concerns about that. We know we have the highest paid teachers in Australia in our government schools. However, we do not track the information as to what their pay is. Tony might give a little more information.

Mr CONSIDINE: In response to the question, the non-government schools fall into a number of different categories—into an independent school and into other school systems whether it is Catholic or Lutheran system. They negotiate with their systems in terms of the agreements they have. Those agreements can vary in those systems. They vary sometimes in the amount of dollars that are paid to people but also around the conditions. That variability is what can attract or not attract people.

Mr CHAIR: Minister, can you confirm for *Hansard* that the answer you gave of 47% was to question on notice 7.12?

Mrs HERSEY: Correct.

Mr CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

That concludes consideration of Output 3.1 and Output Group 3.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – TRAINING AND HIGHER EDUCATION
Output 4.1 – Training

No questions.

Output 4.2 – Higher Education

Mr CHAIR: How much money does the NT Government provide to higher education, and is it just Charles Darwin University?

Mrs HERSEY: The 2026–27 budget allocation for higher education by CDU is \$9.65m, including \$9.27m in operational grants to support the delivery of higher education and research.

Mr CHAIR: Is that \$9.65m funding just from your department? Does it include any other NTG money going to them, or is that the total of NTG money?

Mrs HERSEY: That is right; it is just from our department.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 4.2 and Output Group 4.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES
Output 5.1 – Corporate and Governance

No questions.

Output 5.2 – Shared Services Received

Mr CHAIR: The committee will now move to Output 5.2, Shared Services Received.

Are there any questions?

Mrs HERSEY: Excuse me, Chair, I have an answer to Question on Notice 7.11. There are some links, so I will table that answer.

Mr CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 5.2 and Output Group 5.0. That concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of Education and Training.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all the department officers who have provided evidence with the minister today.

Minister, I will give you a brief moment to thank your staff before we move on to consider outputs relating to the Public Service portfolio.

Mrs HERSEY: It is fitting that we go from thanking the staff we have here today, who are public servants, into OCPE. I thank the department for all the hard work that they do and put into the Estimates. There is a lot of time and effort put into providing all the information in the folders. Sometimes it takes a bit to get to the information you need to find. I thank everyone here today. Thank you, committee, and thank you to the opposition and crossbench as well.

Mr CHAIR: The committee will take a brief recess for five minutes.

The committee suspended.

PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr CHAIR: I note that while outputs relating to the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment sit with the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, the Minister for Public Service is the responsible minister.

Minister, I invite you to introduce the officials accompanying you and to make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes regarding the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment. I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark.

Mrs HERSEY: I begin by acknowledging the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment staff who are attending as witnesses today: the commissioner, Nicole Hurwood; Hayley Green, senior director, Strategic Workforce, Planning and Development; Jo Stieber, senior executive director; and Courtney Mabey, senior director.

The commissioner's office is a small independent office within the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet with a significant and whole-of-sector role. The commissioner is the statutory employer of Northern Territory Public Sector employees under the *Public Sector Employment and Management Act 1993*. This includes responsibility for setting employment terms and conditions, leading enterprise bargaining and managing industrial matters, including before the Fair Work Commission.

The commissioner also plays a central role in upholding the Act's key principles across the sector, including effectiveness and efficient administration; merit-based and equitable employment practices; and high standards of integrity, conduct and performance.

The office supports this role with a budget of \$7.692m and around 35 full-time equivalent staff delivering across four key areas: employee and industrial relations; workforce planning and development; Aboriginal employment and career development; and public sector appeals and grievance.

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment plays a critical role in progressing the government's priorities of rebuilding the economy, reducing crime and restoring our lifestyle by fostering positive workplaces as the Territory's largest employer and supporting the delivery of services that improve the lives of Territorians.

Upon coming to office our government made a commitment to back our hardworking public servants and properly value the work they do to deliver for the Territory, and I thank them. I have been extremely proud as the minister to work with our exceptional public service and the office of the commissioner on delivering a stronger, more specialised service closer to the ground.

A key focus for over the past year undertaken by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment has been negotiations to determine enterprise bargaining agreements for workforces across the Territory. Over 130 meetings with union and employee representatives have been held to ensure good-faith negotiations, with some agreements considering up to 250 individual claims. The office has worked diligently to ensure our government is listening to the unique challenges of each workforce, with offers tailored to reflect those needs.

The commissioner's office has undertaken 11 NTPS enterprise agreement negotiations, with four now successfully settled and another seven in progress. Those completed include the NTPS General Enterprise Agreement and the Aboriginal Health Practitioner Enterprise Agreement which saw improvements to pay and conditions for over 14,000 employees across the Territory.

The NT Police Consent Agreement was finalised through the Police Arbitral Tribunal, and the terms and conditions for the new police public safety officers were determined. This agreement reflected the strongest pay deal for police in two decades and restored the Territory's national competitiveness in attracting and retaining police officers.

Negotiations are continuing constructively for the remaining agreements in line with the government's wages policy. The policy continues to provide balanced parameters for achieving competitive pay and conditions while maintain fiscal responsibility. It also reflects major reform in the Territory's approach to industrial relations with this government's commitment not to freeze wages, unlike the previous Labor government, or cut the public service. For any parameters considered above the wages policy, these are to be balanced through achieving productivity gains with real and bankable offsets in order that agreement outcomes can be managed within agencies' approved budgets.

In more complex negotiations the Commissioner for Public Employment has proactively engaged the Fair Work Commission to support timely progress toward outcomes that are fair for employees and economically viable for the Territory. This approach has included making applications to the Fair Work Commission to help resolve bargaining impasses efficiently in an effort to avoid the extended delays like those experienced in previous negotiation rounds.

Revised offers consistent with the Fair Work Commissioner's recommendations are currently out for votes for the correctional officers and the firefighters which, if supported, will result in a range of improved entitlements, conditions and pay that will promote frontline service growth and retention in these key sectors.

Negotiations are also progressing across sectors, including Power and Water Corporation, Territory Generation, nurses and midwives, medical officers and dentists. The government remains focused on achieving fair, contemporary and financial responsible agreements that support employees and service delivery to Territorians.

Work is underway to develop the NTPS Workforce Strategy 2027–2032 which will set a clear direction focused on supporting Aboriginal employment, promoting disability inclusion and building a workforce that reflects our Territory community.

The office manages a range of Aboriginal workforce initiatives, including strengthened cross-cultural capability training and Aboriginal employee forums, with one scheduled in Darwin later this year. I look forward to attending. I am pleased to report an increase in the number of Aboriginal employees joining the NTPS, as well as an increase in the number of Aboriginal employees in senior positions.

The NTPS is undertaking work to ensure our workplaces are accessible and safe for people with a disability, with a target to raise disability representation to 8% by 2027 in line with our commitment to the EmployAbility Strategy 2024–2027.

Leadership capability continues to be strengthened with 344 employees completing leadership programs over the past year and a further 215 currently undertaking training. Importantly, face-to-face delivery has expanded into regional centres, including Katherine and Alice Springs, supporting capability, development and retention across the Territory. I attended the first Emerging Leaders Program in Katherine recently, with 19 participants completing the program, demonstrating the strength of leadership and talent across our regions.

Alongside this, frameworks continue to be strengthened to support a professional and accountable public sector. This includes enhancements to recruitment and merit processes and refreshed, respectful workplace training aligned to legislative requirements, including positive duty. Employee feedback continues to play an important role in shaping this work. The most recent People Matter Survey achieved a 48% participation rate, reflecting strong engagement and providing valuable insights to inform future improvements in workplace experience and performance.

Overall, employee engagement and workplace satisfaction increased by 2%, representing a meaningful uplift across the sample sizes. Encouragingly, 80% of employees believe that bullying and sexual harassment is not tolerated in their organisation—an improvement of 15% since 2021 and 3% improvement compared with 2023. For the first time, the survey also gave the staff the opportunity to report racism, further reinforcing our zero-tolerance approach and ensuring sector-wide decisions aligned with the experiences of staff.

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment is a small team with a significant responsibility in supporting a capable, professional and high-performing public sector—small but mighty. There are no wage freezes or public service cuts, and chief executives continue to manage workforce and resources to meet service delivery needs. We are focused on growing our own, investing in leadership capability and creating meaningful career pathways for Territorians.

I reiterate my thanks to our public servants for their outstanding work during the sustained severe weather events experienced across the Territory in recent months. Their professionalism, dedication and commitment during these challenging circumstances played a vital role in supporting communities when they needed it most.

Mr CHAIR: I will now open to questions on the opening statement, beginning with the shadow minister.

Mr YOUNG: CPI is currently at 4.2% across the Territory, so why is your government telling Corrections officers, firefighters, nurses, midwives, doctors and dentists to take a pay cut in real terms with your 3% wage policy?

Mrs HERSEY: We came to government with a debt you could hardly even jump over, thanks to your government. We have to make sure that we are fiscally responsible. We said that there was a 3% wages policy. There are many areas where those negotiations—they can access bankable offsets to create more money going into their wages bargaining.

To say that we are not giving them a real increase—the 3%. As I said, we are being fiscally responsible. There is only a finite amount of money to go around, and we are making sure that the NTPS wages remain competitive. It states in that wages policy that we aim to ensure competitiveness with other jurisdictions, but, no we are not the most generous of all.

Mr YOUNG: The Corrections office EBA was voted down by 97.2% of voting members. Given your track record to date with EBA negotiations, do you still believe you are up for the job?

Mr MACKAY: Standing Order 109. That is an opinion.

Mr CHAIR: Member for Goyder, stop. That is an opinion, Member for Daly. The question does not meet 109. You have asked the minister for an opinion. You can try to rephrase the question.

Mr YOUNG: Going back to the Corrections question. How much did it cost the OCP for the service of Corrs Chambers Westgarth for the intractable bargaining declaration against Correction officers union members?

Mrs HERSEY: The legal expenses are paid by agencies.

Mr YOUNG: Do you have a breakdown of those costs through the different agencies?

Mrs HERSEY: It does not sit with the OCPE, it sits with the agency.

Mr YOUNG: You do not have any oversight of that cost at all?

Mrs HERSEY: No.

Mr YOUNG: Negotiations of the nurses and midwives EBA is under way. Can you explain why you are asking nurses and midwives to accept wage increases below inflation?

Mrs HERSEY: The nurses and midwives has not gone out as yet. In actual fact, I am meeting with them soon. It expires on 9 August, so there is work going into the preplanning work. The premise that we do not value nurses and midwives I do not agree with. We value them. When you go to hospital and have a baby—or when you have a partner and a child, Member for Daly—you will understand that those nurses and midwives are the people you want there by your side.

I had three children in the Katherine Hospital. The midwives and nurses I can attest to are amazing. One of them was still there when my daughter had a baby recently. The work, empathy and knowledge they have is second to none. We will make sure that the nurses and midwives, when that goes out and we are bargaining with them, are well looked after.

There is a wages policy. Again, we need to make sure that if they want anything above the wages policy, then it comes with some bankable offsets in their budgets.

Mr YOUNG: Moving to the NTPS code of conduct complaints. I am trying to get an understanding of what that threshold is if you are looking to breach a code of conduct. If, for an example, a member of the public service was to win the award for the biggest piece of gutter trash, were generally a waste of time, I will not dignify your stupid questions of response or you belong in the gutter, your happy place—would that be a breach of the code of conduct?

Mr CHAIR: Hold one second, minister, I will check on that question.

Mr YOUNG: I have not said it is from anyone; I am just trying to understand the threshold.

Mr CHAIR: You have asked a hypothetical question.

Mr YOUNG: It is not a hypothetical because I have not linked it to anyone. I said at the start I wanted to understand the threshold of a breach, so I said I would use it ...

Mr CHAIR: You can re-ask to say: what is the threshold?

Mr YOUNG: I did say that at the start of my question.

Mr CHAIR: But then you have created a hypothetical list of statements.

Mr YOUNG: I was giving an example, just to guide the minister to answer the threshold.

Mr CHAIR: Time has concluded. We are now a minute over.

Minister, I will give you a brief moment to thank your staff.

Mr PAECH: Or maybe answer the question.

Mrs HERSEY: I am happy to given an answer to the question, and thank the staff, if that is okay with you, Chair.

Mr PAECH: Look out—yes.

Mr CHAIR: It is a hypothetical question, minister. You can thank your staff.

Mrs HERSEY: Thank you very much to the staff.

In relation to the question there is a code of conduct, and the NTPS has strengthened its focus on respectful workplace behaviours through a range of initiatives. We are also committed to safe, respectful and inclusive workplaces and to preventing bullying, harassment and inappropriate behaviour.

In wrapping up, I thank the OCPE. There are so many questions here, certainly around all the enterprise bargaining. The OCPE office has done an incredible amount of work. If the opposition or crossbench have any questions, they can write written questions.

I thank everyone here for all the work that they have done. I certainly think that giving the public service—and how much we value them—20 minutes probably would have been falling short on my expectation of questions to the public service.

Mr YOUNG: Extend your time out.

Mr CHAIR: Committee!

The committee thanks everyone from public employment. I know a huge amount of work goes into this. I know that members present and not present have put in a huge volume to prepare for today. We thank you. I apologise for the short time you are with us. The timings is the timings.

We will now break for 30 minutes until 3.30 pm.

The committee suspended.

MINISTER CAHILL'S PORTFOLIOS

TRADE, BUSINESS AND ASIAN RELATIONS

Madam CHAIR: Welcome to the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations to Estimates hearings for Tuesday, 16 June. Minister, I welcome you to today's hearing and invite you to introduce officials accompanying you today.

Ms CAHILL: Thank you, Chair.

Initially, I would like to say that it has been an absolute honour to serve as Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations; International Education, Migration and Population; Workforce Development; and Advanced Manufacturing over the past year.

I am joined today by the executive team from the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations: Hayley Richards, Chief Executive Officer; Kelly Ralston, Deputy Chief Executive Officer; Joanna Frankenfeld, Chief Financial Officer; Jake Quinlivan, General Manager, Business and Regions; and Luis Da Rocha, General Manager, Policy, Strategy and Insights.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement of no more than 20 minutes. I will then call for questions relating to the statement.

The committee will then consider any whole-of-government budget and fiscal strategy-related questions before moving on to output-specific questions.

I will invite the shadow minister to ask their question first, followed by committee members. Finally, other participating members may then ask questions. The committee has agreed that other members may join in on a line of questioning pursued by a shadow minister, rather than waiting to the end of the shadow's questioning on the output.

Minister, I invite you to make an opening statement of no more than 20 minutes regarding the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations. I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark.

Minister, you have the floor.

Ms CAHILL: Thank you, Chair. I have introduced the team. They and the team have worked tirelessly to deliver our government's economic agenda. I thank them for their professionalism, dedication and commitment to Territorians and their support for Territory businesses as we work to attract investment, strengthen our workforce, expand our international engagement and rebuild our economy.

When I appeared before Estimates last year, the challenge before us was clear: the Territory economy needed confidence, business needed certainty and investors needed a reason to choose the Northern Territory. Territorians wanted to know we had a plan to create jobs, grow our population and secure our future. Today I am pleased to report on the progress made.

The Territory economy has turned a corner. In the past year we have moved off the bottom of the CommSec State of the States rankings; led the nation in economic growth; maintained one of the lowest inflation rates in Australia; delivered nation-leading home ownership support; delivered tax relief for small business; and have been recognised as one of the best jurisdictions in Australia in which to do business.

This did not happen by accident. This is a result of deliberate decisions, disciplined economic management and a clear focus on growth, certainty and security. It reflects the confidence that businesses, investors and workers are increasingly placing in the Northern Territory, and that the Territory is recognised for what we are: Australia's gateway to Asia; a strategic energy powerhouse; a critical minerals province; a growing advanced manufacturing hub; and the most exciting investment destination in the nation.

The 2026–27 budget for the department is \$82.72m, which includes just under \$35m in employee expenditure; \$12.4m in goods and services expenditure; \$24.5m in grants and subsidies expenditure; and \$10.6m in services free of charge. This funding is directed to \$37.3m for businesses, providing extensive support to the heart of our economy, which is business; \$8.3m for workforce and population; \$18.8m for trade; and \$18.2m for the corporate and governance output, including shared services to Departments of Mining and Energy and Agriculture and Fisheries.

I will now speak to each portfolio in turn.

Trade and investments sit at the centre of our government's commitment to rebuild our economy, and my responsibility as minister is unequivocal—to take the Territory to the world and deliver opportunity to the Territory. In an increasingly competitive global economy, investment does not just come to those who wait; capital is mobile and investors have choices. A government that sits back and hopes for investment to come to it will be left behind, and that is why we have pursued an ambitious international engagement agenda focused on building relationships, opening markets and attracting investment.

The year to March 2026 encompassed delegations to:

- our closest neighbour, Timor-Leste, where I supported the return of the Darwin to Dili Yacht Race and progressed relationships with business and government
- Japan, including leading a delegation of 20 Territory businesses to participate in a 2025 World Expo in Osaka
- Denpasar to represent the Northern Territory at the Indonesia Australia Business Council Conference and meet with key stakeholders to strengthen economic partnerships
- the Baker Hughes Annual Meeting in Florence where I represented the Territory, the only Australian government body invited, putting the Territory at the forefront of the energy security agenda before more than 2,000 delegates.

Japan remains our most important trading partner. With Darwin Harbour being home to Japan's largest single international investment through the Ichthys LNG project, that relationship continues to deepen. The mission to Osaka showcased Territory capability, strengthened commercial relationships and opened new export opportunities.

Territory businesses secured contract, expanded their presence in international markets, demonstrating that they can compete with the best in the world. One business—Humpty Doo Barramundi—secured an exclusive contract to supply the Australian Pavillion at the expo as well as new export opportunities into Japan; another, Ikuntji Artists, showcased Central Australian culture to a global audience.

Our engagement with Indonesia, one of the world's fastest growing economies, is resulting in expansion of existing and creation of new export relationships, particularly in relation to critical minerals and strategic supply chain.

Taking the Territory to the world is only one half of the story. Bringing the world to the Territory is the other half. In partnership with Darwin Major Business Group, we delivered the inaugural Northern Territory Investment Summit from 15 to 17 July 2025 to accelerate private investment and international partnerships. The summit promoted approximately 30 investment opportunities to an exclusive cohort of 160 invitees, investors, business leaders and government decision-makers from 13 markets.

Post-summit engagement continues across critical minerals and copper digital energy, international interests in the multiuser marine facility, from Japanese, Korean and Indonesian groups, sovereign wealth fund interest in agriculture and investment in and around Litchfield National Park.

Through investment forums, mining road shows, business missions and government-to-government engagement, we are building stronger economic ties and creating new pathways for investment in critical minerals, resources and strategic industries. These relationships matter, creating opportunities for Territory businesses and attracting capital.

Critically, they position the Northern Territory at the centre of emerging regional supply chains. One of the clearest indicators of growing confidence in the Territory is the strength of our investment pipeline. As of 31 March this year, the Territory had 75 active investment projects and 84 active early-stage investment leads, spanning critical minerals, energy, digital infrastructure, agriculture and advanced manufacturing, representing billions of dollars in potential economic activity.

A particularly exciting area of growth is digital infrastructure. Participation by the Territory at the Baker Hughes meeting in Florence enabled clear articulation of the role the Territory has to play in the creation of Australia's digital economy. The Territory is increasingly recognised as a strategic location for data centres and digital investment. We are actively engaging with 12 companies on major data centre projects that have the potential to generate hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity while supporting Australia's future digital economy.

The next DCD2 facility is a strong example. This \$132m investment is nearing completion and during construction has created significant local employment opportunities with 80% of the 120-strong workforce being Territorians. Territory businesses have also played a major role in delivering the project. That is what investment in the Territory looks like—local jobs, local capability and long-term economic benefits for Territorians.

Attracting investment is only part of the equation. A growing economy needs people to build projects, run businesses, teach, care, innovate and create. While the Territory labour market remains strong, forecasts show we will need more than 10,000 additional workers by 2030. Meeting that challenge requires action on multiple fronts. It requires training, workforce development, a worker attraction program and support for people who choose the Territory to ensure they have every reason to stay. That is why we are developing the Territory's first whole-of-government workforce development strategy. Informed by extensive consultation with industry, employers, training providers and community stakeholders, the strategy provides a clear roadmap for addressing workforce challenges and ensuring the Territory has the skills needed to support future growth.

In addition, we are delivering practical workforce initiatives through the workforce development program and the Global Worker Attraction Program, which has become one of the Territory's most successful workforce initiatives. Through targeted campaigns in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada and the United States we are showcasing the Territory as a destination for opportunity, lifestyle and career growth. Thousands of prospective workers have engaged through these activities, with more than 21,000 jobseekers now registered on WorkerConnect, giving Territory employers access to a growing pool of talent across Australia and around the world.

Migration remains critical to the Territory's future. Without skilled migration the Territory cannot meet its workforce requirements. We continue to advocate to the Australian Government to ensure the Territory receives the migration settings and visa allocations necessary to support our economic growth. The Northern Territory Designated Area Migration Agreement remains one of the most progressive migration programs in Australia, giving Territory employers' greater flexibility to address workforce shortages and plan for the future.

Migration is not simply about filling jobs; it is also about growing businesses, communities, families and our population. That is why we have invested \$0.3m in Harnessing Opportunities in Migration Engagement (the HOME program) to support new migrants to settle successfully, connect with employment opportunities and become long-term Territorians.

International education is another area where the Territory continues to outperform. International education is one of the most valuable exports, with each international student contributing approximately \$50,488 per annum which equates to millions of dollars into our economy each year. International students bring diversity, skills, cultural connections and global perspectives, extending their value beyond simple economics. Many choose to stay, work and build and their future in the Territory, and that is why we continue to support the growth of the sector through targeted promotion, stronger industry partnerships and initiatives that improve the student experience.

Business remains at the heart of everything we do. Small businesses employ Territorians, support local communities, drive innovation and create opportunity. My objective is simple: I want the Northern Territory to be the easiest place in Australia to start, operate and grow a business. That means reducing red tape, improving regulation, supporting innovation, providing access to grants and advice and ensuring government procurement creates opportunities for local firms.

Our investment grants, including sponsorships, for this year are estimated to reach \$21.5m. These grants support businesses, industry, advanced manufacturing, aviation connectivity, international students and growing and strengthening our workforce.

Over the reporting period hundreds of Territory businesses had direct support through our grant and assistance programs which saw \$2.4m paid to 401 businesses. Businesses have been supported to strengthen security, expand operations, improve productivity and invest in growth. As of 31 March, over \$1.4m had been invested to support more than 200 premises through the business security assistance program.

We continue to support entrepreneurship and innovation through the Territory's innovation ecosystem, with \$1.05m invested in Accelerate and the Business Innovation Program, and Territory businesses are proving that world-class ideas can be developed right here in the Northern Territory. Whether in advanced manufacturing, technology, Defence, agriculture or creative industries, innovation is helping Territory businesses compete on a national and international stage.

Advanced manufacturing deserves particular attention. For too long people have underestimated what can be manufactured in the Northern Territory. That perception is changing. Today, Territory businesses are producing sophisticated high-value products that are being sold across Australia and around the world. From advanced glass manufacturing to robotics, additive manufacturing and smart technologies, local companies are investing in capability and creating highly skilled jobs.

Our investment of \$1.2m in the Advanced Manufacturing Ecosystem Fund has supported projects that strengthen industry capability, encourage innovation and support commercialisation. The Territory is not simply extracting resources; we are adding value, developing capability and building new industries.

Supporting business growth also means ensuring government works better for business, and that is why we have continued to deliver procurement reform. We have simplified purchasing processes, reduced administrative burden, improved opportunities for Territory suppliers and strengthened local participation in government contracts.

We established the Territory Procurement Champion to provide an independent avenue for industry engagement and feedback, ensuring more government spending stays in the Territory and supports Territory businesses.

As major projects move forward, we are equally focused on maximising local participation and creating pathways for Territory businesses to enter supply chains, particularly in the gas energy infrastructure and critical minerals sectors.

Throughout the year the department has supported businesses and communities through a series of significant weather events and natural disasters. The Territory has faced flooding, cyclones and severe weather across multiple regions. In each case departmental staff worked closely with businesses, communities and other agencies to support response and recovery efforts. Whether through business

engagement, grants administration or practical recovery support, that work has helped businesses get back on their feet and continue contributing to local communities.

The story of this budget and the work it supports is a story of confidence—confidence returning to the Territory economy, returning to business; confidence from investors; confidence from workers; and confidence in the Territory's future. However, economic transformation is not achieved in a single year, and there is more work to do, but the direction is clear. The foundations have been laid, investment is coming, workforce is growing, business confidence is strengthening and opportunities are emerging across every region of the Territory. We are building an economy that is stronger, more diverse and more resilient and creates jobs, attracts investment and supports families and communities—an economy that well places the Northern Territory to play its role in Australia's future prosperity.

The Territory's best days are not behind us; they are ahead of us. Our government is committed to seizing the opportunities before us.

I welcome the committee's questions.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Are there any questions on the opening statement? Member for Arnhem.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, minister, and welcome, officials.

BP3 shows the total of DTBAR expenses going from just over \$89m in the 2025–26 budget down to \$82m in the 2026–27 budget. Why is the department's budget lower? Which programs, grants or functions of your department account for that reduction?

Ms CAHILL: There is a number of programs that were included in the current financial year that were time limited and not continuing through into the next financial year. One of those examples is the funding that we received to develop the business plan for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art gallery that was scheduled for Alice Springs but which subsequently was unable to proceed due to the insufficient funding provided by the federal government. There is a number of other time-limited funding projects that are coming to an end.

The essential business of the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations continues, and is robust, very strong and focused on developing the Territory's economy.

Ms UIBO: Can you table a full list of those time-limited projects or programs that have been either reduced, discontinued, reprofiled or transferred since the last CLP budget?

Ms CAHILL: Noting that in BP3 it provides a full explanation of why decreases are presented. I point that out to the Leader of the Opposition.

Areas where there has been a decrease, there was a decrease of just under \$600,000 primarily due to realignment of budget between outputs in line with agency operating requirements.

In the Trade and Investment output there was a decrease, primarily due to a \$2.8m transfer to the forward budget beyond 2026–27, 2027–28 to support the winning investment and unlocking the growth initiative we announced.

There is also changes in post-machinery of government which took some time to flow through. There was a lot of realignment that occurred through 2025–26 and then into 2026–27, to make sure that, following the MOG, that everything was where it was meant to be which, as you would appreciate, was a fairly complicated process and taken over time.

We are confident today that all of that has been completed, so the 2026–27 budget is reflective of the work that is required for the Trade, Business and Asian Relations department.

Ms UIBO: I appreciate your response. Two of the areas you outlined total about \$3.4m. My calculation from my first question to you is close to \$6m. If you have that table handy to point out, that would be appreciated.

Ms CAHILL: There are a couple of areas where we are expecting less revenue; primarily, in the migration area. That is a direct result of significant reduction of approvals in visas and allocation of visas through the federal government's program into migration. We also have a couple of programs that ...

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Ms UIBO: Do you have the figure for that for Migration NT?

Ms CAHILL: That is around \$350,000. There were a couple of programs that have finished. One I already mentioned was the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art gallery project. We also had advance manufacturing grants that were a part of a five-year program that finishes in this financial year.

There was a Facing North and World Event Expo event delivery, which was time-limited funding. That was about \$300,000. Then there was a feasibility study that was done into copper and critical minerals with the Department of Mining and Energy. That was about \$300,000 and was a time-limited project.

Ms UIBO: Any reason the advanced manufacturing grants have ceased after the five-year period?

Ms CAHILL: That has been reframed into a new program. There is a focus on partnering and opening up opportunities in advanced manufacturing with interest businesses that are far more reflective of what an economic environment would expect, which is in-kind support as appropriate, and support in engaging and connecting those potential investors into partnerships with each other so we see a much greater private investment and equity into the advanced manufacturing sector. It is far more sustainable as it is not reliant on government funding.

Ms UIBO: Is there a name for that overall process that is rolled into?

Ms CAHILL: The parameters of that program are still in development and I will not pre-empt my announcement for next year in this environment.

Ms UIBO: Come on, minister, why not? We are all friends.

Ms CAHILL: Come on, it is a front page.

Ms UIBO: I appreciate the answer and response and respect there is development on the way there.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: In regard to what the Member for Arnhem raised, advanced manufacturing businesses operating in the Northern Territory continue to grow in number. Existing manufacturers continue to build their representation on international markets, as you know. Could you provide an overview of any significant investments in the reporting period?

Ms CAHILL: It is an exciting area for the Northern Territory. We know that with everything that is occurring in the Northern Territory currently with the abundance of resources being unlocked, the work being done to support industry and grow development and have not just Australia, but the region, focus on the opportunities that are presented—particularly on the back of the guarantee of a long-term secure energy supply through the Beetaloo Sub-basin. We are able to look to grow that ecosystem. In the previous year—the previous investment fund which went over five years and finalised in this current financial year—but it has seen a realisation in the advanced manufacturing sector. We have seen businesses make a strong, firm decision to step forward themselves with the support given—often around connectivity to potential investors, connectivity into how they unlock land access and so on.

One fantastic example of what we have been able to achieve in this particular area is the Northern Glass Solutions facility; that is a \$20m project that was largely funded by the proponents. We have also had a range of projects come to realisation under the Advanced Manufacturing remit, ranging from things like Arctic Installations, which manufactures tropical insulated panels specifically designed for our tropics; work being done with Colemans Printing, which now has state-of-the-art printing capacity, particularly around labelling and packaging; Rise, which is a really exciting company doing incredible work on robotics and AI and doing some interesting investigation on how to map waterways without disrupting them; Steeline, which is an advanced manufacturing facility; and Life h2o, which is a deployable water security system. There is a huge range, and I think that the Northern Territory is really well-placed for pushing forward in these downstreaming and upstreaming opportunities on the back of the resources that we have available.

Ms UIBO: The department's annual report claims a private sector investment pipeline of 75 projects valued at \$119.4bn. How many of those 75 projects have reached final investment decision?

Ms CAHILL: By their nature, they are in the pipeline. We have not yet reached final investment decision because that is the nature of growing those projects. I will take the opportunity—people will be aware of, and we are excited about, the fact that one of the most significant projects to come into the Northern Territory in recent times is the Arafura Rare Earths Nolans project. That has reached final investment decision and is about to commence construction, which provides a significant opportunity not just for the Territory but also for Australia to be an active competitor in an area that is currently a monopoly run by China in two very critical components required for most of our electronic equipment.

As everybody would appreciate, when you are actually progressing these leads they often have a long lead time. By example, the Beetaloo Sub-basin Tamboran's project has been in progress for 30 years, and we are now seeing it come to fruition. Similarly, Beetaloo Energy have reached investment decisions and is proactively pushing forward. Santos is back online because we unlocked the opportunity that sits within that basin. BW Offshore came to Darwin and has started producing and exporting gas. That came to a grinding halt under previous governments. We were excited to facilitate that and see that progress.

Core Lithium has reopened recently as the demand for lithium in the market has increased significantly. Excitingly, Journey Beyond has created tourism expansion through acquiring the crocodile hotel in Kakadu. The Crowley Darwin Bulk Fuel Facility has come to fruition. There are a couple of gold mines doing extremely well in the current market that have also seen the benefit of creating a proactive, pro-investment environment.

Ms UIBO: From your response I got that there has been one project of the 75 that have reached final investment decisions since the annual report?

Ms CAHILL: There have been three.

Ms UIBO: Three of the 75 that were originally listed in the report. Can you table a pipeline which breaks down the project status and value for those 75?

Ms CAHILL: I am sure the Opposition Leader would appreciate that we could not give the specific details of some of those projects because of their nature and how the projects are leaning. We can provide you with the sectors that the projects are being developed in. Their value is a moveable feast depending on what is happening in various parts of the global economy. As everyone would appreciate, where we were back in February before the fuel crisis hit the whole world, is significantly different to now. It is not something that you can set in concrete—no pun intended—but I can read out the sectors.

Ms UIBO: If it is a long list, I am happy for you to table it.

Ms CAHILL: The areas we are working in is not significantly long. Obviously the nature of some of the projects is sensitive because they relate to areas like defence, minerals, oil and gas, digital technology, agribusiness and space. We also have a fair bit of work happening around the critical minerals. There is new exploration happening in various areas there and those businesses and investors are still often forming their partnerships.

One of the most exciting areas in terms of the projects in the pipeline—I wish I could give you greater detail on—is the advancements in the digital technology environment. There is no question that the Northern Territory has become a significant focus, not just in Australia but across the region, for the place to be to develop digital embassies, digital data centres and digital security. This is fuelled by the development of the trans-terrestrial fibre optic cable network, down the centre of Australia, which is shaving significant time off the transport of vital data, particularly in monetary transactions which saves millions of dollars for companies.

All these works are currently in play and will be coming to realisation, particularly the digital technology in terms of the fibre optic cable network, within the next two to three years. They have a lead time, but the lead time is reaching its conclusion. Several of the proponents in this will be getting ready to make their announcements in the not-too-distant future.

Ms UIBO: Have there been any additions to the pipeline since the start of the reporting period, 1 July 2025 until 31 March 2026?

Ms CAHILL: There have. Most have been in the data centre environment. It is a dynamic and continually evolving space. There are about 12 projects that have evolved in the last six months. One person's crisis is another person's opportunity. For the Northern Territory, the challenges that have been faced by a number of hyperscalers in the management of their data security as a result of what has happened in the Middle East

has led to them looking to other more secure and geopolitically stable environments. The Northern Territory will benefit significantly from that.

Ms UIBO: You spoke about the NT Investment Summit and the major initiatives with your government bringing investors, business leaders and senior stakeholders to Darwin. At the risk of sounding like a Dorothy Dixier, what were the outcomes of the summit?

Ms CAHILL: We are pretty excited about the outcomes of that project. The Territory's first Investment Summit in July of last year was delivered in partnership with the Darwin Major Business Group, which is a dynamic and exciting partnership. It was established to make sure that the world understood the opportunities in the Northern Territory.

The summit showcased strategic economic and commercial opportunities, with about 30 investment opportunities promoted to an exclusive cohort of 160 invitees because we wanted people in the room who could make these projects come to fruition.

We had investors, business leaders and government decision-makers from 13 markets. It was a three-day program. What we did that significantly differed from what had been done in the past was we brought people to the Territory to show them exactly what the Territory had to offer. The general consensus from each of the proponents who came was they had no idea of the remarkable opportunity in the Northern Territory.

Of the 163 delegates, 68% of them were C-suite, executive or chairs; 73% were investing organisations; and 13 markets. There were some fantastic sessions. They highlighted our commitment to making sure that we attract the right investment and showcased the collaboration that was possible between government, industry and investors.

In terms of outcomes, we are currently—the post-investment summit has been exciting. We have had investment in critical minerals and copper, further investment opportunities relating to the digital and energy sectors. That is probably the most exciting area for me because it is a greenfield project and provides a huge opportunity for the Northern Territory.

We have had international interest in the multiuser marine facility from Japanese, Korean and Indonesian groups, sovereign wealth fund interest in Territory agriculture and investment pathways, and investment in and around Litchfield National Park. The feedback from the attendees highlighted the opportunities regarding developing the investment framework to support the activation of Beetaloo.

Following that, we continue to deliver the pipeline of work that is growing and has come as a direct result of the engagement that has happened from the investment summit. We are keen to build on that with the investment summit being rescheduled for July this year. The interest has been incredible from the various proponents who attend previously and a whole new raft of proponents who we have engaged with in the past six months in our international delegations.

Ms UIBO: The response you gave me to written question 186 related to this specific question in Estimates. You are probably prepared. Can you provide the total cost of the Northern Territory Investment Summit?

Ms CAHILL: I would be delighted to. The Investment Summit was done for a cost of \$245,454, which was paid as a grant to Darwin Major Business Group to deliver this summit. Darwin Major Business Group also invested in the summit. They contributed \$75,000. An additional \$20,000 was generated through industry partnerships, sponsorships. It was a pretty good return on the investment.

Ms UIBO: The total cost of the summit, is that including the Darwin Major Business Group contribution of the \$75,000 or is that on top of the \$245,000?

Ms CAHILL: It is in addition to.

Ms UIBO: Can you give me the total cost?

Ms CAHILL: It is \$340,000.

Ms UIBO: Of that, \$245,000 was NTG.

Ms CAHILL: It was a grant.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I want to touch on the Investment Summit, and I am glad that the Member for Arnhem asked the question. Could you expand a bit in terms of the local participation, as well as which bilateral markets we engaged with?

Ms CAHILL: Moving to the markets that we engage with, obviously Australian companies; Timor-Leste; and we had people from Indonesia, UK, Singapore, Japan, Switzerland and India. We had a number of high-profile government officials who attended, which was encouraging, and they have continued to liaise with us on what the opportunities are. There were a couple more—I cannot remember what the flags are, sorry—the UAE, some well-placed, significant investors; from Australia, some large superannuation investment funds and private equity companies that are very keen to look at the opportunities.

One of the things that will stick with me is one of the significant funds that attended had said publicly in the forum that it was the best investment summit he had ever attended, and that was not just in Australia; that was across the world. It is a testament to the team who put it together because it was incredibly successful. It has led to some fast progress of discussions around engagement with the investment opportunities in the Northern Territory, especially in the Beetaloo Sub-basin, and a reigniting of interest in areas that previously had become a little dormant—for example, Core Lithium and our goldmines in the Tennant and Barkly region.

There is a clear demonstrable push to make sure that any of these investors who look to do business in the Territory understand clearly that a requirement is that they engage with local businesses as well. We are working with our local businesses to ensure they are ready for those opportunities as they arise.

Ms CAHILL: A correction, for the teacher, my maths was off. I missed the third contribution; it is \$358,000.

Ms UIBO: What was the third contributor? I had NTG, Darwin Major Business Group and the third one?

Ms CAHILL: Partners in sponsorship.

Ms UIBO: Combined, anyone who attended might have had an info stall kind of fee?

Ms CAHILL: Sponsorship from interested parties. I can give you an example.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, that would be helpful.

Ms CAHILL: The Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility.

Ms UIBO: What was the amount for that?

Ms CAHILL: They took up most of the \$20,000.

Ms UIBO: Twenty, I missed that. I do trust your earlier figure, but thank you for being honest and updating it. We appreciate it.

Former federal Treasurer and former Ambassador to the United States, Mr Joe Hockey, was one of the headline speakers at the summit. What did Mr Hockey bring to the event?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, are you asking for an opinion? Can you just reframe that question of what did he bring to the event.

Ms UIBO: What value-add did Mr Hockey provide for the investment summit event with a total of up to \$358,000?

Ms CAHILL: Aside from an opinion about the fact that he was an amazing speaker, the value-add was that for our businesses and the investors that were in the room he gave a clear articulation of what the opportunities were. He was clear—I have to think back now; it was nearly a year ago, so forgive me—and gave clear guidance about if you want to do business in particular areas—for example, data centres and what the critical elements were. He was clear on the opportunities between our trading partners and how we needed to make sure that we were clear what sort of business we were looking for and what the investment structures would be.

The reality is he has three decades of solar experience and networking in sectors. That created opportunities for introductions for a number of people who were at the Investment Summit which I think they would have found invaluable. Again, that is an opinion. I am not speaking on behalf of them.

He is also an investor in his own right. Having him in the room and showing him what the Territory has to offer, hopefully, would have tweaked his interest in looking to invest in some of the work that is being done here as well.

Ms UIBO: I appreciate your response. I note it was in July 2025, but within the Estimates reporting period.

Did you take the opportunity to meet with Mr Hockey while he was in Darwin? Do you know if any of your colleagues, NT Government ministers, took the opportunity to meet with Mr Hockey?

Ms CAHILL: I can tell you for certain that there was lunch put on by the Darwin Major Business Group where they invited a number of interested people. I was at that luncheon. There was possibly one other formal group that we will check before I confirm that. I did not want to drop someone in it and say that they met with him if they did not. I am just confirming that.

Obviously, he would also have organised his own agenda. There may be other people he met that we were not directly involved in facilitating.

Madam CHAIR: I am not sure that the minister can answer questions on behalf of other people, so we will keep the line of questioning direct to the minister's responsibilities.

Ms UIBO: The reason I ask is you would be aware that Mr Hockey is a lobbyist and the founding partner of Bondi Partners. While Bondi Partners' advocacy is listed on the NT lobbyist register—one of the 26—Mr Hockey is not listed as an authorised lobbyist. Given that there is a code of conduct, I am interested if there was a question on notice if any other NT Government ministers met with Mr Hockey. That was at a paid-for and facilitated Northern Territory Investment Summit ...

Madam CHAIR: Again, Member for Arnhem, the minister will not be able to provide information on behalf of other ministers about their meetings. That would be a question for each individual minister.

Ms UIBO: The Investment Summit that was paid for by the minister's department, you are saying has no relevance in the question, Chair?

Madam CHAIR: I am saying individual meetings that may or may not have happened with other ministers are not the responsibility of this minister to know. Therefore, the question has to be directly related to the minister in front of you, not in relation to other ministers.

Ms CAHILL: I can confirm that we did not organise any meeting specifically. The luncheon I attended was not organised by our department either.

Ms UIBO: Do you accept, given that Mr Hockey provided a keynote and there was a platform as a speaker at a taxpayer-supported Investment Summit, that is a significant form of access and influence and could be viewed as being a lobbyist?

Ms CAHILL: No, I do not accept that. I think there are many people who are employed and engaged to provide speaking engagements who cover a raft of industries. On this occasion, he was identified as someone who had some valuable insight into what investment looked like and what the opportunities would be for the Territory. That was what he delivered.

Ms UIBO: Before inviting Mr Hockey to headline the summit, did your department undertake any conflict of interest or lobbyist register checks, including whether Mr Hockey, his Bondi Partners or any related entities had clients with interests within the Northern Territory?

Ms CAHILL: As the Leader of the Opposition would be aware, the advice in relation to the register that has been put in place by our government—which did not previously exist under previous governments—is that anybody who potentially is a lobbyist is notified of their requirement to register. As you have already noted, his company is registered on that list.

Ms UIBO: Was your department aware that Bondi Partners' advocacy was listed on the NT lobbyist register when Mr Hockey was invited to speak and headline at the Investment Summit? Who authorised the invitation?

Ms CAHILL: As I previously noted, for the summit we provided grant funding and the Darwin Major Business Group also provided their own source of funding to put the summit on. His involvement was a direct result of their engagement with him.

Ms UIBO: With over two-thirds of the overall cost of the Investment Summit, there was no input from your department about who spoke or how the sessions were run—just give a grant of \$245,000 and then wipe your hands of any responsibility or accountability in organising the summit.

Ms CAHILL: I think it was a question; I am not sure. I will clarify. Grant money is given in any circumstance to organisations and businesses to operate within a parameter. The Darwin Major Business Group had a parameter to conduct a successful investment summit, and it delivered exactly what it was engaged to do.

Ms UIBO: Were there key performance indicators attached to that grant? Has it been acquitted?

Ms CAHILL: As I have already stated, the agenda and the level of success of the summit was getting people there who were critical and key proponents in their respective fields. I think we had a target of 150 participants. We exceeded that, with 163 participants.

We wanted to ensure that we had comprehensive engagement across the region. We did that by delivering 13 different countries' involvement into the summit. We made sure that the people who were in the room were the decision-makers of their organisations. As already noted, 68% of delegates were either C-suite executives or Chairs of their organisations. As the key indicator of whether or not we achieved our goal in the Investment Summit, that is the baseline there.

On top of that, the work that has continued post-summit and the ongoing engagement and the number of projects that are being facilitated through the introduction of the Northern Territory to those 13 markets and those 163 participants, many of whom had never been to the Northern Territory before—which was terrifying to be honest; that we had an environment of people with money to invest who had never even considered coming to the Territory. It indicates a lack of promotion of the Territory previously into those spaces.

By anybody's measure the Investment Summit was well worth the money that was invested in it. It is delivering, as I noted before, pipelines to millions and millions of dollars of investment for the Northern Territory, which is unprecedented.

Ms UIBO: How much was Mr Hockey paid to speak at the event?

Ms CAHILL: Again, the Darwin Major Business Group ran the event. They had the budget. They were asked to deliver a successful investment summit. They were told what our key objectives were, which was to get the right people in the room. I cannot answer the specifics of that question.

Ms UIBO: I hope you are appreciating my line of questioning in terms of NT Government taxpayer dollars being used to assist in a successful summit, as you mentioned.

Noting that Mr Hockey is not an individual listed on the NT lobbyist register—although his company is—were there any checks and balances to ensure that there were no processes, informal discussions or advocacy for Bondi Partners' clients and any other commercial interests that Mr Hockey may have had access to throughout the summit?

Madam CHAIR: I must interfere for a moment because you seem to be repeating the same question that has already been responded to. Mr Hockey's company was listed on the lobbyist register and the minister has already responded to say that the Darwin Major Business Group were the ones who contracted that job. I believe you are repeating your line of questioning in different ways, but are looking for a similar answer. You may wish to rephrase your question or take a different line of questioning.

Ms UIBO: Thank you, Chair, I understand when the minister responds, and I do not need it repeated back at me.

The question—if you did not listen—was specifically a different question. Were there checks and balances for the taxpayer-funded dollars—two-thirds of the Investment Summit—to ensure that the unregistered individual on the lobbyist could not use his position at the taxpayer-funded summit to gain access to and lobby in his own right, aside from Bondi Partners?

Ms CAHILL: As you may be aware, given you seem to have done some research around Joe Hockey—perhaps you are interested in engaging him in the future—he is listed as a speaker for major events as a separate entity to what he might do in his day-to-day business. As you have noted in your previous commentary, he was a previous member of a Liberal government federally; he was Treasurer. He has a reputation that is much bigger than what one of the companies he may be involved with is doing.

Clearly, the Darwin Major Business Group considered that having him participate and sharing his knowledge and understanding of the critical importance of trade and investment and the opportunities that, for example, may arise in dealing with the United States, Defence and looking at how those opportunities might be progressed for the Northern Territory—Darwin Major Business Group clearly believed that his value-add was significant. I can tell you categorically that everyone who attended the summit and listened to him was able to take on board his clear messaging about the important things to do when you are progressing your Territory to ensure that your economy is growing, as well as the pitfalls you need to be aware of and what the opportunities are that you need to progress.

Ms UIBO: Nothing formally from your department as a check and balance. That is my last question on that one, Chair.

Madam CHAIR: I do not think there was a question there.

Ms UIBO: The question I asked before, which she answered, was my last question. I am just letting you know.

Madam CHAIR: Are we moving on?

Ms UIBO: Yes.

Mr O’GALLAGHER: I think you raised in your opening statement that you touched on the approvals taskforce. I understand that today marks 11 months since the government received recommendations from that taskforce, agreeing to the business report. Can you update the committee on how many recommendations have been inputted in the reporting period?

Ms CAHILL: I am sure you appreciate the approvals red-tape taskforce had a very big job. We were excited to provide an opportunity to business to look at what we do, how we do it and how we could improve. Altogether, that taskforce made 70 recommendations to government, 60 of which were accepted immediately and 10 of which were taken on in principle. Forty-eight of those recommendations were committed to be completed by 17 July, and all of them have been implemented. For our department we had four, all of which have been completed, much to the delight of those organisations where we have significantly reduced the red tape. For example, in our real estate agents legislation we have made it so that licensing can be for more than just one year on year, so that they can have the opportunity to renew their licence and registrations for one, three or five years. We have also expanded that to include their agent representatives who were treated quite differently under the previous legislation.

We have made sure that we have made life a little bit easier for our not-for-profit sector and our community organisations who operate under our *Associations Act* so that they too have much clearer and less red tape to deal with. We are very pleased work that has been done. There is still some more work to do and in the process of implementing the red-tape taskforce recommendations, we have stumbled across a few other things that could probably do with little bit of a tidy up and a cleanup, and we are committed to doing that before the end of the year.

Mr PATEL: We know that migration to the Northern Territory presents significant strategic opportunities for migrants to contribute to the Territory’s economic and social development. Can you outline the process by which applicants receive nomination and approval for their visa? What assessment has been made of economic contribution for visa holders to the Northern Territory?

Ms CAHILL: Thank you for the question, Member for Casuarina, and I trust and hope that your experience when you came to our shores was a positive one because that is the goal of everything that we do when we look at attracting particularly skilled migration to the Northern Territory and also our international students. We really need to make sure that we are making the experience so beneficial to them and so attractive to them that they make the decision to make the Northern Territory their home well into the future.

We have been able to estimate that each skilled migrant who comes to the Northern Territory contributes on average a \$108,000 per annum to our gross regional product which is around an estimated \$1.4bn economic

contribution between 2021 and 2027. It is a massive contribution that is made by these people, not just in delivering work skills to our businesses that currently they are not able to attract from within in Australia, but also the fact they come here; they spend money here; they rent houses here; they pay taxes here. It is a very solid contribution that they make.

It is really critical for the Northern Territory that we continue to advocate for our migration strategy because we know, as I mentioned in my opening statement, we are going to need about 10,000 new workers by 2030 to realise the potential of a number of the projects that are underway and logically, as we grow our internal workforce where we actually encourage our young people into trade sectors and further education to be able to fill those roles into the future, we still need to deliver them now and so skilled migration is critical.

We are able to actually work with many businesses to make sure they have access. We have the best DAMA in the country. We are the envy of many other jurisdictions as to the level of skills that we have had included in our DAMA and the success rate of our businesses in attracting those workers here.

We also have temporary arrangements in place for migration skilled workforce in our PALM scheme, so we have many people who come here to work from the Pacific Islands and Timor-Leste, which is an important support to our near neighbours in terms of assisting them with upskilling their workforce and contributing back into their economy.

It is a very important part of who we are and what we do; it creates this wonderful multicultural community that we have. We want to make sure that we send the message very loudly and very clearly to anybody who is considering migrating to Australia that the Northern Territory is the place they need to come, and we will do everything in our power to make their transition into our community as smooth as possible. We welcome their willingness to invest in our Territory as well.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: On the migration aspect, but particularly the visa process—it is my understanding that the visa is issued by the Australian Government—covers skilled workers, student visas and so on. We have some difficulties with some of those assessments. What has been your efforts to lobby the Australian Government to create a visa situation that addresses the situation of the Northern Territory, which is different to what is happening in eastern states.

Ms CAHILL: There has been quite a substantial amount of work done within that particular area to ensure the federal government who—you are right—have the final say in how many visas are processed each year and how many are issued. We are really advocating the Territory's position and our need for that increased migration into what is one of our most regional and remote areas.

I am pleased to say that the federal government ministers and senators who are responsible for migration understand clearly the challenges faced by the Northern Territory. They are particularly concerned that there has been delays in processing visas that have been approved through our general skill migration—our DAMA program. They have made a commitment to clear the backlog over the next 12 to 18 months. I was at a meeting recently in Melbourne at the Migration Roundtable where they reported they had decreased wait times down from two years to 18 months, and they are progressing that through now much more quickly.

It presents a challenge when we are competing with a political environment on the east coast where many people feel that there are too many migrants. We are a category 3 region in terms of migration, and we are advocating for specific rules and visa processes for category 3 regions, so the whole of the Northern Territory is category 3, as are some parts of Queensland and WA. They are also advocating with us. I think with a little more lobbying—dare I use the word given the previous conversation—of the federal government, we will actually achieve some traction into that area and really look to having visas that are specific and only for the Northern Territory that improve the stickiness of people coming in on those visas. We want to ensure we see that investment returned and ensure the financial benefit into the Northern Territory from our skilled migrants grows in the future.

We have indicated challenges in the last 12 months, but we are working really hard to overcome them and advocate with the Australian Government to make sure we get our share of what we need to make sure we can deliver; not just for the Northern Territory, but for Australia more broadly.

J DAVIS: Please let me know if this is against the opening statement; it is on behalf of the Member for Mulka. It may be under 1.1.

Minister, for the reporting period how much grant funding has the NT Government allocated to support businesses in homelands?

Madam CHAIR: I am not sure that we have touched on this in the opening statement.

J DAVIS: I am not sure either.

Ms CAHILL: No.

Madam CHAIR: If you could, let us know what output group that might fit in.

Ms CAHILL: It will not be too far into the agenda, I do not think.

Madam CHAIR: Try again in 1.1 and see if it fits there.

That concludes questions on the opening statement.

Agency-Related Whole-of-Government Questions on Budget and Fiscal Strategy

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (2026–27) Bill as they relate to the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations.

Are there any agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy?

Ms UIBO: Your department is responsible for procurement, policy and reform. What percentage of NT Government procurement spend went to Territory businesses in the Estimates reporting period?

Ms CAHILL: One of the critical elements to answer this question is that we reviewed the tier 1 and tier 2 levels under procurement in our first charge or procurement reforms specifically so that we could actually get far better usage of local and Territory businesses. The previous tiers had made it a little challenging, so we raised the tiers 1 and 2 levels so we could make it easier for Territory businesses to compete in, what had previously been, a fairly cumbersome process.

What we can tell you is that during the reporting period, if we look above tier 2, which is more than \$50,000 and up to \$200,000. There was a total of 603 procurements by the Northern Territory government, which resulted in 844 contracts, with a total value of \$1.045bn. Of those, 69% valued at \$880m. So, 84% of the total spend were awarded to Territory enterprises.

Ms UIBO: I appreciate all the detail. Does that mean the remaining percentage went interstate or overseas? And, if there is two in that category, what would that breakdown be for the remaining 31%?

Ms CAHILL: The work has been done—we have the Territory procurement champion that we introduced. The majority of work he has been doing in this initial period is dealing with making sure we get that right, where we can. There has been a very significant uptake. Generally speaking, for the jobs that do not get done in the Territory, it is because it is either not available here, not available to scale, or it is a product we are not able to provide.

One of the things we are doing, using the ICN NT, is monitoring where work does go outside of Territory borders to see if one of the reasons why those product unavailable here is that businesses in the Territory simply were not aware there was a market for them. They have already identified some products—I do not have the specific details, but I have had an anecdotal discussion about this. They have gone, oh we know a company who can do, we can now tell them there is a scale that makes it viable, and they are working with them to be able to do that.

I am really expecting an uplift in those percentages over the next 12-18 months. Some businesses all take them a little bit of time to actually be able to produce those particular products. It is an absolute focus and a very clear message being given. Territory businesses must come first; there has to be a good reason not to be purchasing locally.

Ms UIBO: Minister, I appreciate your fulsome response. With the tier system, did you say there was five tiers? Tier 1 to tier 5?

Ms CAHILL: No, there is two. There is tier 1 up to \$50,000. Then it is everything else.

Ms UIBO: So, would that be classified as a tier 3?

Ms CAHILL: Yes.

Ms UIBO: So, there is no tier 4 or tier 5?

Ms CAHILL: No.

Ms UIBO: Can you provide any of the detail for the tier 3? Maybe if you could do it all in one lot, that would be helpful. Tier 1, tier 2 and tier 3, that would be helpful.

Ms CAHILL: Tier 1 is up to \$50,000. Tier 2 is up to \$200,000, and so the requirements of purchasing under those two tiers, we have reduced red tape, where we can, to make it a simpler process. There are five tiers altogether. Tier 3 is \$200,000 to \$500,000, which requires an open public tender process, managed by the usual process. Tier 4 is \$500,000 to \$5m, which is a major procurement requiring a public tender. Then tier 5, which is \$5m and above, is a high-value and complex procurement which also requires a public tender.

Ms UIBO: I thought that was strange that we only heard tier 1 and tier 2. Thank you for that clarification. Is it possible to get a breakdown of the percentage of each of the five tiers that went to Territory businesses?

Ms CAHILL: Can I ask for clarification? Are you asking specifically for Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations procurement?

Ms UIBO: Yes, just for your department, unless you collect for other agencies.

Ms CAHILL: My understanding is that there was a written question on this and the information was provided previously. I can tell you as a summation that about 15% is interstate, and less than 5% is international.

Ms UIBO: I assume your department deals primarily with any complaints received regarding procurement. If so, how many complaints were received in the Estimates reporting period, and how many of those complaints were upheld?

Madam CHAIR: I am wondering if this sits within the line of questioning of budget and fiscal strategy or if it needs to go to an output group?

Ms CAHILL: I can give you a broad response to that. We might need to get the specific numbers, but yes, we deal with that. We implemented the Territory Procurement Champion so that we have an arm's length from government capacity to deal with complaints so people who make those complaints feel confident that it is not being influenced in any way. To date this role identifies systemic issues in procurement and advises us with opportunities to improve the policy, practice and capability across all agencies.

The exciting thing for business is that the Territory Procurement Champion engages directly with them, so they know who they are dealing with and exactly what is going on. Since commencing, the Territory Procurement Champion has been actively engaging with businesses. He has not been waiting for complaints to be made; he has gone out there to actively engage with businesses. To date he has engaged with more than 140 businesses to get their feedback on how things are going and where improvement could be progressed. We will use that to inform future procurement policy reform if it might be needed.

We still also have the Procurement Review Board in place, so if there is an investigation that is undertaken and the parties disagree with the outcome, that can be submitted to the review board, which is under legislation. So far, we have had an adjudication on 18 appeals during the reporting period. Most of the complaints that are raised directly can be resolved—often misunderstandings or miscommunications—but there have been 18 significant complaints dealt with by the review board.

Ms UIBO: The second half of that question was: how many of those 18 complaints were upheld?

Ms CAHILL: We will take that for now and see if we can get it to you before the end of the period.

Ms UIBO: Can I take that on notice so that it does not get lost?

Question on Notice No 8.1

Madam CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: Of the 18 procurement complaints, how many were upheld?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms CAHILL: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.1.

Ms UIBO: That is impressive, with the Procurement Champion already engaging 140 businesses. She should chuck him in as the Territory Coordinator; he only has a KPI of 120. He is already smashing it out. I believe he has less time in the job than the Territory Coordinator has.

Madam CHAIR: Is there a question, Member for Arnhem?

Ms UIBO: There certainly is a question. How many contracts have been changed or re-tendered because of any procurement concerns raised in the reporting Estimates period?

Ms CAHILL: I can speak to our department. The answer to that question would be none. If you want to know for any of the other departments you would need to address that question to the specific departments.

Ms UIBO: Have there been any reforms made following the Alice Springs and Darwin procurement roundtables, or has that been taken on board and tabled?

Ms CAHILL: Sorry?

Ms UIBO: Were any reforms made following the Alice Springs and Darwin procurement roundtables?

Ms CAHILL: We did not just have roundtables in Darwin and Alice Springs; we conducted meetings across the Territory about procurement. I was in Katherine and Nhulunbuy. We talked to businesses across the Territory, plus our departmental team wherever they had an opportunity to have a discussion about what challenges there were.

The loud and clear initial concern was that most businesses we talked to were not of the view that there was a focus on buying locally. They struggled with that. We made it clear that was the focus. It was realised that one of the problems in that area was the tier levels in the lower tiers, because they were very low, so it put into a procurement process relatively small expenditures, which made it difficult for people to engage. That was one of the reasons why we amended the tiers and raised Tier 1 to \$50,000 and Tier 2 to between \$50,000 and \$200,000.

There are a number of other areas we continue to work on from feedback from those various forums. That will be our tranche 2 reforms, which are currently being developed.

Generally, 'Can we please make it easier to do those smaller jobs more quickly and have access to work that is being driven by government departments?' was clearly the loudest message we got in those initial periods and was one of the quickest solutions to implement.

Ms UIBO: I have some questions about the Safer Business Program. Would you prefer them in Output 1.1 or are you happy to take them now in the global?

Ms CAHILL: The next output would be great, thank you.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.1

Ms CAHILL: Of the 18 appeals, nine were upheld; so 50% were upheld.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of agency-related whole-of-government questions on budget and fiscal strategy.

OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – TRADE, BUSINESS AND ASIAN RELATIONS
Output 1.1 – Business

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output Group 1.0, Trade, Business and Asian Relations, and Output 1.1, Business.

Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: What is the Safer Business Program? Is this just the rebranding of the Biz Secure Program under a new title?

Ms CAHILL: The program that you are talking about has only recently been announced. It is a new program going forward. I am not sure that it is relevant to this budget Estimates. We can talk about the previous Biz Secure program.

Ms UIBO: Does the Biz Secure program exist anymore or is it one of the programs that has been made null and void, and changed to the Safer Business Program?

Ms CAHILL: Biz Secure as a program still exists. It does not formally finish until the end of the financial year. Based on feedback we have received from business and a range of other areas about where the focus should be, a new program has been developed that is much broader than just putting security screens on windows. It is about creating safer environments and invigorating our public spaces. That is the new program for next year. Biz Secure as it currently exists is still being finalised, and it will cease to exist on 30 June.

Ms UIBO: Thank you for the clarification. What is the total cost of the Biz Secure program in its current form?

Ms CAHILL: The total amount for the budget period is \$1.65m.

J DAVIS: On behalf of the Member for Mulka, for the reporting period how much grant funding has the NT Government allocated to support businesses in homelands?

Ms CAHILL: Essentially, we take the approach that everybody can apply for assistance and grants. I can speak to the regional breakdown, but it does not go into the granular detail of homelands versus regions.

J DAVIS: That would be appreciated.

Ms CAHILL: To 31 March, the total amounts of grants paid to the Barkly region was \$33,906; Big Rivers was \$220,338; Central Australia was \$343,891; Darwin, Palmerston and Litchfield was \$1.485m; East Arnhem was \$75,105; Top End was \$94,825; and then we have another group of all other areas not accounted for which received \$180,307. The total for all regions across the Territory as at 31 March is \$2.434m.

J DAVIS: This data may be too granular as well, but on behalf of the Member for Mulka, for the reporting period how many homeland-based businesses have received government support of any kind?

Ms CAHILL: Your presumption as you asked that question is correct. It is very granular detail, and it is not recorded in that way.

J DAVIS: Is that recorded anywhere?

Ms CAHILL: Not in that manner is my understanding. I am advised that we record across regions. There are about 5,000 businesses that we have engaged with. It is not to say there will not be some businesses in homelands, but they may have been ramped up into the regional areas.

Madam CHAIR: We will have a quick comfort break and return at 5.10 pm.

The committee suspended.

Madam CHAIR: We will continue with line of questioning on Output 1.1, Business. Are there any further questions?

Mr PATEL: How is ICN NT helping Territory businesses build capability, secure opportunities and maximise local participation in major strategic projects?

Ms CAHILL: I think I alluded before to just how important the ICN NT is in terms of being able to determine where and how we are spending money, how much of the spend, particularly from government, stays in the Territory, what we need to do to progress that and how we actually convince investors in the Territory that we have the skillsets and base they need to see their projects come to fruition.

Having seen some similar ICN programs and organisations in other states and territories, I can, without any hesitation, say we have the best ICN in the Northern Territory. The quality and calibre of the data is significant.

We provide them funding so that they can do the work to ensure the procurement that happens externally to the Northern Territory Government, in particular, can be properly assessed. Where opportunities for investment come up, for example, I am a big company, I am thinking I want to do something in the Northern Territory, does the Northern Territory have the capacity to do the work? I can go to ICN NT and say, 'Okay, this is what I want to do. Who is here and can do it?'

One of the things they are working hard on, particularly for those large international organisations who might be used to being able to find one business or group to do the one job they need doing is explain and, to a degree, educate some of these larger investors that in the Territory we may have four or five businesses who can work together to deliver their project. They are used to working together to deliver their projects.

Just because we do not have one very large producer, for example, of widgets that are blue, together we can have five companies that can produce those widgets in the quantities they need. They then look to change their tendering arrangements, so our Territory businesses are not excluded from the opportunity before them.

The total funding to that organisation is about \$1.35m. The data they collect for us is incredibly invaluable. Territory businesses register with them; they make sure they keep their profiles up to date. For example, you might have a business who today does one particular area of manufacturing, but then decides to expand their footprint and does a whole other level of manufacturing, updates that, then ICN NT knows if someone is coming to the Territory and are looking for that particular skillset, they can say, 'You can go and see Joe Blow from this business, and they can help you with that work'. We pay ICN so that NTG businesses can create a free profile, so that they are not impeded in any way to be in there front and centre when businesses and investors come looking to do business in the Territory.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: In regard to the ICN NT, but also with procurement and local content, does the ICN NT have a role in verifying whether there is local capability for procurement purposes? Sometimes you have to go interstate because people say there are no local businesses. Do they play a role in some of that verification process?

Ms CAHILL: Yes, ICN NT play a critical role in that process. For example, if there is a government department that wants to purchase an item, they have to actually demonstrate that they have checked with ICN NT—if they are looking to purchase it outside of the Territory—that the item is not available in the Northern Territory. It is one of the ways that ICN NT gathers the data about where demand might be, and they have found—particularly in one department where multiple divisions of that department were looking to purchase that particular item, not realising that they were all purchasing the same item, so a local manufacturer said, 'If we need that many it is worthwhile for us to do it'. That is an important role, so all departments are required to demonstrate that they cannot purchase something in the Territory before they embark on an investigation of purchasing outside of the Territory.

Ms UIBO: The NT Aboriginal Affairs Framework initiative 3 prioritises creating businesses and jobs on country, yet your government has phased out the Aboriginal Business Development grant program. If jobs and business growth in the bush are a priority for the CLP government, why have you and your department scrapped the Aboriginal Business Development grant program?

Ms CAHILL: One of the things that has become obvious is that over time when grants are given in a fairly continual fashion, you can lose the nuances that you need to make sure that money is spent where needed. We have done a revision of all of the grants and have reframed how we are doing everything. We are having our business advocates working really closely with all businesses, including Aboriginal businesses, to make sure that they maximise all the opportunities that are available to them. In some respects, it has been in direct response to some of the feedback we have had from a variety of Aboriginal businesses who have felt that there has been a little cladding done by other businesses and that they have missed out on opportunities. By actually creating that playing field where they can compete on their own merits—which most of them are

more than capable of doing—and where they might need some assistance, the assistance is available to them, there are really good results being achieved.

Ms UIBO: How much of the budget for your department has been cut from the Aboriginal Business Development grant?

Ms CAHILL: The reality is that a significant proportion of grants that are available for Aboriginal businesses are Commonwealth grants, and there is significant investment in that area. We work with all businesses, including Aboriginal businesses, to maximise their opportunities of success.

Ms UIBO: Were there any Aboriginal Business Development grants through the program that were issued during the reporting period?

Ms CAHILL: In terms of which businesses may have received them; I cannot give you that detail, but we do have the Business Growth grants that are available to all businesses in the Northern Territory.

Ms UIBO: My question was, specifically: were any Aboriginal Business Development grants issued through the program during the reporting period? I am just looking for the number, not the names of the businesses.

Ms CAHILL: I can tell you that there was a total of \$360,000 paid to assist Aboriginal businesses to achieve success.

Ms UIBO: How many business grants was that \$360,000 figure made up of?

Ms CAHILL: I do not have the breakdown of how many businesses were made up from those grants because they were done through a third party.

Ms UIBO: You just provide the \$360,000 but do not know how many businesses that reached? I am asking for a number; I am not looking for the names.

Ms CAHILL: As the Member for Arnhem would know, in terms of reporting back, most of that is done in stages. I do not think we will have reports back until the end of the financial year.

Ms UIBO: Could I get that question on notice?

Madam CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: Minister, how many Aboriginal businesses received the benefit of the \$360,000 grant program through your department?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms CAHILL: I note that we would not be able to report back in the usual timeframe because the reporting period does not finish until later in the year. We would not have the data.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, did you understand the context around that? The reporting will not come back until the end of the financial year.

Ms UIBO: I did. If a question is taken on notice, then there are 30 days to answer, which then provides the department time after the end of the financial year, which is 30 June, and there are a few weeks after that to provide a response to any questions taken on notice. I believe that is the process.

Madam CHAIR: Responses for the Estimates process are due 13 July.

Ms UIBO: Yes, after the end of the financial year, which is 30 June 2026.

Ms CAHILL: The acquittal process is beyond 13 July, so we would not have the data by that date.

Madam CHAIR: I think the answer is, no; that is not a question that can be taken on notice within the reporting period.

Ms UIBO: I understand. The Northern Territory Government Aboriginal Affairs Framework, initiative 3, is to create jobs and businesses on country; I believe this is an internal document available to all NT Government

agencies. Can you advise the committee how much of your departments budget has been allocated to this initiative?

Ms CAHILL: The advice is that we embed the framework into everything that we do. If we would like to talk about the specifics, I can give you a few examples. The department supported the Tiwi Islands Training and Employment Board to develop the Tiwi Islands Community Workforce Plan, which was launched in October 2025. It is a three-year plan with a strong focus on developing local job opportunities for Tiwi people. We work hard and have engaged with more than 1,300 businesses for the reporting period and delivered work regarding the Flexible Skills and Training Response Program. We make sure that it is embedded in the framework, and the objective of creating opportunities was embedded in that.

The training programs were delivered in Darwin, Palmerston and Jabiru. It included crime prevention through environmental design, digital marketing, automate to elevate using artificial intelligence to streamline business and financial literacy. Each of those have the framework objectives embedded in them because everything we do is focused on that. There is a strong focus from the department of creating employment opportunities for young Indigenous people, because that is the answer to many of the challenges in some of our more regional areas.

We have engaged in eight East Arnhem communities and regional centres and supported 183 local businesses through the coordinated engagement and capability initiatives. We established the East Arnhem business hub as the central access and coordination platform for business, stakeholders and government. We implemented the East Arnhem business support pathway 2026, which strengthened referral pathways and access to providers.

We delivered in the Barkly regional engagement and service delivery, with 369 businesses during that reporting period, making sure there was a focus on business advice and support, workforce development and coordination with local stakeholders.

We took part in the Barkly careers expo in September 2025, which had 30 exhibitors and more than 200 participants, which was supporting the connections between jobseekers, students, employers, training providers and service organisations, most of which in that region obviously have a strong focus on ensuring that the principles in the framework are adhered to.

There was also a coordination of two Barkly Training and Education Network meetings to progress training with partners towards a Barkly training calendar.

In Central Australia we conducted 1,115 business engagements across the region during the reporting period. We actively supported the Alice Springs summer crime reduction strategy, including completion of 149 business surveys; promoted the new online business safety and security checklist; supported the Southern Region Emergency Operations Centre; and presented to the NT Women in Construction Forum on procurement reforms, with a particular focus on creating opportunities for our regional and remote communities.

Everything we do has that framework embedded in it, and everything we do as we move out into communities and talk to different businesses and different communities is able to be adapted as needed for the areas.

Ms UIBO: Will any of the end-of-financial-year grant recipients be published in the department's annual report, as is normal practice?

Ms CAHILL: Yes.

Ms UIBO: Can you provide a breakdown of Aboriginal procurement expenditure by your agency in the reporting period of 2025–26?

Ms CAHILL: We do not do a lot of external procurement within the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations. We work with a small number of businesses who we would then have to go to and extract what their involvement is in that area, which is probably not feasible to produce a report.

Ms UIBO: In terms of direct procurement from your agency—is that what you said?

Ms CAHILL: That is correct.

Ms UIBO: If there was any sort of global procurement, that would be run through the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet on behalf of the NT Government; is that correct?

Ms CAHILL: Every agency does its own procurement. We do not keep that information centrally. We are responsible for creating what you should be doing and how you do it, but the execution and monitoring of that is a department-by-department responsibility.

Ms UIBO: I appreciate that, which is why I asked specifically for your agency and not globally to any other agency. I do understand that.

Why has the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network now moved office from Development House on the Esplanade?

Ms CAHILL: The answer is quite simple: we ran out of space for our team and we needed to get as many of our team into the one space as possible.

Ms UIBO: Does that mean that floor will be filled with department of TBA and your agency staff?

Ms CAHILL: That is definitely my understanding and has been my request.

Ms UIBO: Is there a cost to move NTIBN out of that space?

Ms CAHILL: The NTIBN were tenants under a peppercorn lease. Their tenancy expired at the end of March, but we extended that until the end of June to provide them additional time. We have not enforced a requirement for them to make good, which can be quite expensive for a tenant occupancy.

Ms UIBO: In terms of being able to support the removalists, is that being covered by NTIBN or the department?

Ms CAHILL: That would be an operational expense for the organisation. It is standard practice that operational expenses for any organisation are met by the organisation.

Ms UIBO: What was the cost of the peppercorn lease for NTIBN in Development House?

Ms CAHILL: Most peppercorn leases, in my experiences, are \$1. We will check that and verify that for you.

Ms UIBO: Can I get that on notice?

Ms CAHILL: I have just been advised that it is not something that we managed and oversaw. It is managed by DCDD, through Northern Territory Property Management. It does not sit with our department. From my personal experience, that is generally what it is.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.1.

Output 1.2 – Workforce and Population

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.2, Workforce and Population.

Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: Did the government have a population growth target for the reporting period? If so, what was the target and was it met?

Ms CAHILL: There is not a specific target for population growth. We can report that the population is growing in the latest data that was available to us. As you will appreciate, this data is often a little behind the current period. I can tell you that in the period from September 2024 to September 2025, growth was 1.4%.

Ms UIBO: Understanding you have said that there is no specific target, is the indication just the percentage? Is that all you measure when we talk about growth in population?

Ms CAHILL: The conversation and discussion that comes from the Department of Trade, Business, and Asian Relations is about growing the workforce. In doing so and by connection, they grow the population.

Ms UIBO: Your portfolio includes International Education, Migration and Population, so there is no target set for yourself and the department around monitoring that?

Ms CAHILL: There is not a specific target set by the Department of Trade, Business, and Asian Relations. My recollection is that there is a broader government agenda of growing the population; I just need to clarify what that is. I think I know what it is, but I do not want to give you the incorrect information. I will check and let you know.

Ms UIBO: Are you talking about checking now, or do you want to take it on notice?

Madam CHAIR: We might check in before the end of this output group to see if they can answer that question.

Ms UIBO: Normally you would just take it on notice, and if they can answer it they will.

Madam CHAIR: The minister says that she just needs to double-check a certain thing, so she will come back.

Member for Arnhem, do you have any further questions?

Ms UIBO: I am waiting for a check.

Madam CHAIR: We will come back before the end of the output group.

Ms UIBO: That is not normally how questions are. You either get the response ...

Madam CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, I am the Chair. We have done that previously in this sittings, and that is what we will do. That is what I am making a call on.

Ms UIBO: You are making up your own rules in the process of being a Chair.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, that is the call we are doing at the moment. Do you have any further questions on Output 1.2?

Ms UIBO: Yes, I do.

Madam CHAIR: Continue.

Ms UIBO: Does the government have any workforce attraction targets, including targets for skilled workers, interstate migration, overseas migration or regional workforce growth?

Ms CAHILL: As I indicated in my opening statement, the overall need by 2030 is an additional 10,000 workers across a range of areas. The work we are doing is to look to target to attract skilled workforce—not just internationally but from the rest of Australia—to encourage people to move to the Northern Territory and enjoy the amazing lifestyle and opportunities we have.

We are targeting through study, training attraction, retention initiatives to support them. It is one of the reasons why we have implemented what is the best Home Owner Grant Scheme in the country; to say to people 'Come here with your work in the Northern Territory your dream of home ownership will be much closer'. It is also one of the reasons why we have enabled that grant to be available to permanent residents, which is quite unique in this country. Usually they are excluded from those types of schemes.

Our global worker attraction program is a key government initiative to support the workforce supply. We want to make the Territory the destination of choice for skilled workers, making sure that we have a sustainable workforce pipeline for Territory businesses and promoting our lifestyle advantages, employment opportunities and long-term career prospects as part of that.

We have held a number of active engagements in the last few months. In July 2025 we had the New Zealand–NT Job Expo which included on-the-ground information sessions in both Christchurch and south Auckland. One of the things that is attractive about New Zealand is we do not have the same challenges of the need for visas to be granted to that workforce. It makes it a fluid workforce and one that is easily able to be transitioned into the Northern Territory.

We have also had the work done on the services that are available. The engagement with industry in the NT jobs expo is an indication of how important and what a good opportunity many of the businesses around the Territory consider it to be. Whilst the work was led by our Office of Workforce Development, there was a representation from Hospitality NT, NT Council of Social Services, Primary Health Network, ICT NT, motor traders, civil contractors—a whole range of people. The Chamber of Commerce said this is where we need to go to attract our workers.

Other departments also attended that expo knowing it was a good source; for example, the Department of Corrections and NT Police Force. I have been advised it was a successful recruitment program. There were over 1,400 people who attended the event. The office continued to work closely with internal and stakeholders to effect the transition and realisation of the people who expressed an interest.

I talked in my opening statement about the Worker Connect platform, which is a free platform for businesses to register. It currently has 21,000 job seekers registered which is incredibly exciting. It is a fantastic resource for our businesses to get access to the skill sets they need. They can put in there what they are looking for and it will deliver them the registered people. At least half of those people also have their CVs uploaded so they can straightaway see what the opportunities are. We will continue to do that.

We also have programs being conducted this year in the UK, Ireland and New Zealand. We have delivered some successful online activities into South Africa, where we broke the platform. There were so many people who dialled in initially to get that information. The team are in Melbourne this week, I am told, trying to convince Victorians, as they are freezing their bottoms off, they should come to the Northern Territory where it is much nicer.

We have a situation in Australia where there are a number of industries that are shutting down where there are workforces being dislocated. We are making sure we tell the story that they can come to the Northern Territory and have, not just good job prospects for themselves but also their partners and a wonderful lifestyle for their families.

We have a clear strategy around what we need to do to grow the workforce. We are working closely with industry to make sure we have a clear idea of what they need, and we can deliver on that. We have developed a soon to-be-announced, workforce strategy that is quite unique in that it is not just looking at government need, but industry need as well as the not-for-profit sector.

Everybody has been consulted and had an opportunity to say where they felt the gaps are and what needs to be done to make them successful into the future.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Arnhem?

Ms UIBO: I am just waiting for my answer from the other question.

Ms CAHILL: I did not want to give you the wrong steer. The target is \$4,000 a year increase. It is the aim that has been set, including a net migration of at least \$1,300 each year. So, the achievement of the 1.3% in growth was in the CommSec report, I think, which indicated we are on track to deliver our agenda for growing the population.

Mr PATEL: Minister, NT Build provides a portable long service leave scheme for the construction industry, ensuring the transportability of entitlements across employers, covered by NT Build. This is a great initiative to maintain our workforce and population steadier growth. Could you provide any data on the scheme's performance, including the most recent levy rate settings?

Ms CAHILL: You are right. The NT Build scheme is an incredible success story for our construction industry. The portable long service leave scheme, which was implemented a number of years ago, provides long service leave to an industry where there is a lot of movement between businesses and a lack of ability for many workers in the building industry to have employment with one employer for a long period.

It is administered by a registrar, who is appointed by the board who oversees that. The board meets and monitors the operation of the legislation. To give you an idea of the work they do and the success of the scheme, as at March 31 there were 704 benefit claims to workers pay, totalling \$5.48m, with 10,667 active worker registrations and 809 registered employers. It shows a strong uplift by employers and seeing this is an important scheme they participate in. There is \$103m in funds that are managed through a funds manager. The fund manager is JANA.

They collect levies that reinvest into the scheme. To March 31 of this year just under \$2.1m in levies were collected. The levies are collected from projects that are over \$1m in value. The scheme is regularly audited, every year independently by a skilled auditor who understands how these schemes are intended to work. It is being closely monitored to ensure the contributions being requested from the building sector will meet the needs into the future. They are in the process of implementing a new information system to modernise some aspects of their operation, which will occur in the next financial year. It is a very robust scheme and the envy of several jurisdictions interstate because of the way it has been established independent of government. It has meant businesses that are involved in federal government or NT Government projects do not have that conflict by being part of a scheme that is managed by the people they are working for.

There was a significant issue for the businesses that were involved with the recent Western Sydney airport development; because it was a Commonwealth project, they could not make contributions to their scheme from that project because the Commonwealth Government could not make contributions to its own scheme.

It is an efficient scheme and well supported by the building sector. It has union representation on the board, so it is representative of workers' needs as well. The fact that the money has been paid in the way it has is testament to the fact that is an effective process.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: What are the incentives for local businesses to retain a greater workforce? After the announcement by the Treasurer back in 2025 about the payroll tax amounts which came into effect on 1 July 2025, from your perspective what feedback has the government received from Territory business about the impact of lifting the payroll tax-free threshold from \$1.5m to \$2.5m?

Ms CAHILL: The businesses we talk to have been incredibly welcoming of raising the tax-free threshold, particularly welcoming the fact that trainees and apprentices were excluded from the tax-free threshold because it enabled them to grow their businesses without impacting negatively their capacity to employ more staff. Before the changes were implemented several businesses we spoke to indicated they were basically at a threshold point where if they grew their businesses more, they would risk significant hikes in their payroll tax requirements. There were businesses that were reluctant to take on trainees and apprentices for the very same reasons because those wages were also allocated into the total for their payroll tax payments.

Those changes have created an incredible opportunity for not just the businesses but also our young Territorians who are looking to take a pathway into an apprenticeship or to a traineeship. They now can engage in businesses and work while they are learning and studying while the business is able to grow their own workforce.

The changes were incredibly well received. They have had a positive impact on businesses, particularly our small businesses, and 96% of the businesses in the Northern Territory are small to medium, so any assistance given to them to secure their future is something we will look at. Any opportunity we have to encourage businesses to create training and apprenticeship opportunities for our kids is also something that is critical, and these changes in the payroll tax delivered both.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

Output 1.3 – Trade and Investment

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now consider Output 1.3, Trade and Investment.

Are there any questions?

Ms UIBO: In responses to Written Question 223 for each interstate and international trip you have taken in the reporting period, does the information provided in your written answers include the full cost of staff travel for every trip?

Ms CAHILL: Can I just clarify whether it is question 223 or question 23?

Ms UIBO: It is 223.

Ms CAHILL: We have a question 23 in relation to travel.

Ms UIBO: It was provided from CMC as a whole-of-government question and it went to each minister and their office.

Ms CAHILL: I am happy to go through each of the travel lines I have undertaken. Would you like all the travel for the whole year, whether staff were involved or not?

Ms UIBO: Yes, I have that. It just says, 'Traveller Minister Cahill'. It does not have 'adviser' or 'staff member', so I would like to know if it included staff members or where the staff travel is recorded if it is not in the written response.

Ms CAHILL: I do not have the response in front of me, so I am little bit at sixes and sevens.

Ms UIBO: Are you happy to take it on notice?

Ms CAHILL: Yes, and I will see if I can get a copy, and I can then tell you. I have details of my travel, but I do not have details of the question that you have.

Ms UIBO: As an example—just so you understand where the line of questioning is—the Energy Exchange Australia trip had you as the minister and adviser; however, all other trips that are listed in the written response only have 'Minister Cahill'. I am wondering where the differentiation is, particularly the staff travel versus the minister and staff.

Ms CAHILL: What I can tell you is that my recent international travel did not involve advisers, so there were no staff.

Ms UIBO: Do you mean it was just officials—no adviser staff in terms of your ministerial office, just officials from the department? Are they separate costings?

Ms CAHILL: The specific costs for my ministerial travel mean that I travelled without an adviser, and I only travelled independently. The departmental travel is separate to that.

Ms UIBO: I will ask that first one as a question on notice and then I will go through a few of the trips that we wanted to question.

Question on Notice No 8.2

Madam CHAIR: Member for Arnhem, please restate the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: For each interstate and international trip you have taken in the reporting period, does the information provided in Written Question 223 include the full cost of staff travel for every trip?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms CAHILL: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question asked has been allocated number 8.2.

Ms UIBO: Were staff or advisers present on the trip to Dili, Timor-Leste?

Ms CAHILL: Yes.

Ms UIBO: Where would their travel breakdown be found? It is not listed in 223.

Ms CAHILL: Are you talking about ministerial staff or departmental staff?

Ms UIBO: Ministerial staff and advisers.

Madam CHAIR: I have a question in relation to this because I am wondering whether the previous question taken on notice interferes with this question. You are asking if 223 included staff, and now you have asked again whether that trip included staff in relation to what was listed in 223.

Ms UIBO: Does information provided in written questions include the full cost of staff?

Madam CHAIR: It feels like it is the same question in relation to a specific piece of travel.

Ms CAHILL: Can we take that on notice for now and I will get a copy, as I do not have that. It was the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, so information was provided to them, but I do not have the detail of that either. I feel this was question that should have been asked to the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, but I will see if I can get a copy of that question.

Madam CHAIR: Can you please repeat the question for the record.

Ms UIBO: Were ministerial staff or advisers present on the Dili trip? You said yes. If so, where would we find the travel breakdown for those advisers or staff on the trip?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms CAHILL: I have just had clarification that question 223 was to the Chief Minister's office and they have all that detail. I can tell you what my travel was specifically, but I do not have the breakdown because the ministerial staff do not work to me obviously, they work to the Chief Minister, so all that detail was in the question to the Chief Minister.

Ms UIBO: Yes, I understand, and I have all of yours here listed and taken it out in a table-by-table line, going to an earlier question where there was a cancelled trip for yourself and an adviser listed on the trip, but then all other trips that went ahead only have yourself listed.

Ms CAHILL: The information you have on that table then would be my travel.

Ms UIBO: Yes, so where would staff travel be found, those who are working as your advisers?

Ms CAHILL: The staff travel would be found in the department of Chief Minister because that is where it sits.

Ms UIBO: So separately—not attached to your office.

In terms of your travel were there any official allowances that were paid? That column is blank in every single one of your responses, or the department's response on your behalf.

Ms CAHILL: That is correct, Member for Arnhem, because I made a personal decision that I would not spend taxpayer moneys anywhere that I did not have to. I have never claimed an official allowance on any of my international or my travel.

Ms UIBO: That explains why each column is blank.

In terms of any of the written answers if there was no travel allowance paid, just making sure that it is separate in terms of the staff, if they were entitled to and claiming travel allowance that would then come through the global CM&C bucket, as opposed to the Minister Cahill office bucket; is that correct?

Ms CAHILL: That is my understanding.

Ms UIBO: There is one trip listed, an overnight trip to Katherine on 1 December 2025, where there are no expenses for accommodation. Is that an error, or did you have private accommodation supplied?

Ms CAHILL: It is because I did not stay overnight.

Ms UIBO: Okay, just a day trip.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: We all know the importance of reliable air services to the Territory's trade and investment performance. What action have you and the department continued to progress to strengthen aviation connectivity, be it internationally, domestically and, importantly, within the Territory?

Ms CAHILL: It is an area of great passion, I think, for all Territorians, because we know that living as far away as we do from pretty much everywhere is always a challenge. It has been a priority to continue working with our domestic partners to ensure we have connectivity through the Northern Territory and to the rest of Australia, and that we have international connectivity.

Several routes have been increased during the previous year. Unfortunately, recent events around fuel availability have put some of them under pressure. We are continuing to work with the three primary airlines

in Australia—Jetstar, Virgin and Qantas—to ensure we retain connectivity to the Northern Territory. The fact that there has been a number of regional areas where services have ceased in the past three to four months but the Territory has largely been able to retain connectivity is testament to the work that has been done by members of the department.

There will be some challenges as we move forward, and if we do not have a resolution to the current situation in the very near future—we are all hopeful that will happen—there will be some pressure. Unfortunately, that is one of the things that has made it difficult to progress the work we are doing with some of our international partners, to look at providing domestic servicing to routes that are currently not serviced at all in the Northern Territory.

We have the ability, with the federal government, to introduce cabotage routes. Where there is not a service by a domestic airline, we could encourage an international partner to fly into Darwin and service some of those routes. One example that has been publicly talked about on many occasions is the need to have an internal route from Alice Springs to Uluru. We are continuing to have discussions with our partners to see how we might be able to progress that.

We are being proactive as we ensure the routes we are working on remain front and centre to the airlines we are talking to. We are having very proactive and transparent discussions with those prospective new airlines. One of the destinations we have been working on is Jakarta. We did a lot of work, after the fuel crisis commenced, with China Southern Airlines who suspended their routes between Guangzhou and Darwin. They were convinced to return once a week from May to September. We are still working on that. They committed to considering increasing that to twice a week after September, dependent on the outcome of the situation in the Middle East.

Most excitingly, Aero Dili are commencing twice weekly flights from Dili to Darwin this Sunday. It was originally meant to start in late May, but there was some realignment done to ensure they could continue to do that route in the face of risks around fuel supply, but they have made the decision to proceed. That very first flight will come in on 21 June.

We are seeing an increase in capacity growth in 2025, largely around people starting to fly more, and really looking to make use of available routes. A message I have been sending loudly to our business community and to travellers is that we need to ensure the airline routes we have stay in play, despite the challenges of the current fuel situation that remain. The only way to do that is to utilise them. We are working very hard to persuade our partners in the airline industry that the Territory is committed to building that.

We suffer from being a very small jurisdiction in terms of population and having what equates to an international airline route just to get from Darwin to Sydney or Sydney to Melbourne. We understand that they must make their decisions based on commercial viability, and we do not want them to be flying at a loss. We appreciate the commitment that has been made to continue to progress this.

We want to ensure that as we increase our connectivity into other regions that we can sustain them into the future. We are committed to partnering with our airlines. We have looked at what was formerly the TAAS scheme. We have now rebranded and refocused that scheme into RACE (Rebuilding Aviation Connectivity for the Economy). The reason for doing that is there were no consequences for airlines that entered agreements with us under the TAAS if they did not give the route sufficient time to be successful and just pulled out without any real consideration. We are now building in that if they partner with us there is an expectation that they will commit to a specific period of time, that they will give these routes time to grow and embed. If they do not, then there will be a consequence for withdrawing early. We have committed that funding until June 2028. We learned our lessons from the previous TAAS experience.

We will make sure we continue to work to increase the opportunities between the Northern Territory and our Asian partners through international routes and continue to work with Qantas, Jetstar and Virgin to ensure that we retain that connectivity.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: One of the challenges with our trade and economic performance is the shoulder period we always have. Could you outline what initiatives your department is taking to stimulate activity during that shoulder period? In particular, how did we go with October Business Month, which I understand is one of those initiatives?

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Chair! Can I ask that, given we have Child Protection and DV, I respect that the Member for Karama has asked questions, but you share the same Caucus room as the minister. I would love to get to those. I am not sure how many questions are left.

Madam CHAIR: We will let the minister answer the question, but I will ask if we can wrap up as quickly as possible.

Ms CAHILL: Essentially when there are those quieter periods, we are looking at what we can do to attract more, particularly tourism to the Northern Territory and business opportunities. You mentioned October Business Month. We also have a range of events. We work in close partnership with the department of Tourism to ensure that. We are working with business to make sure that we can create opportunities to encourage people to fly here in what we consider our beautiful Wet Season, but they might consider it a little hot and sweaty.

October Business Month delivered some significant investment into the Northern Territory, with people travelling to the Territory to attend. Also, for the events such as our various festivals and all of the things that occur in the Territory, we work closely with industry, our communities and tourism to make sure we sell the message of the Territory to our borders and beyond, not just in Australia but into the Southeast Asian region.

We are eminently closer to our Southeast Asian nations than we are to the rest of Australia. We have been doing a lot of work, for example, with Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Korea and Japan about encouraging tourism and, most critically, China because there are a number of opportunities to grow our tourism business through China Southern Airlines' commitment to the Territory. I am confident they will not mind a little rain when they get here.

We will continue to do that and sell the Territory opportunity as broadly as we can.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 1.3 and Output Group 1.

OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – CORPORATE AND SHARED SERVICES

Output 2.1 – Corporate and Governance

Output 2.2 – Shared Services Received

Output 2.3 – Shared Services Provided

No questions.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of Output 2.3 and Output Group 2.0.

OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Madam CHAIR: The committee will now proceed to Output Group 3.0, International Education. I note that while this input sits with the Minister for Education and Training who is responsible for the delivery of education services to international students in NT Government schools, Minister Cahill is responsible for international education strategy.

Are there any questions?

Mr PAECH: No, thank you.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Yes.

Mr PAECH: Please be quick.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: International education is a strong focus for me, given my previous role in attracting international students to come here. Can you update us on your issues over the last year to increase the number of international students who have come to study, work and live in the Territory?

J DAVIS: Through the Chair, can I request that you do it briefly, given the time?

Madam CHAIR: The minister has the opportunity to answer everybody's questions here, and I will give it to the minister.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: We have a whole session to come yet.

Ms CAHILL: International education and the student population is an incredibly important part of the Northern Territory's community. They make significant contributions to our economy and, most importantly, they are

one of the sources of growing our skill sets and our population well into the future. There have been some fantastic positive stories around the experience of our international students where they have come and done their education, finished it and stayed on. They have then worked and grown businesses here. They have families here. I think there is not a person in this room who has not benefited from the excellent skills, opportunities and business services that many of those international education students have given us.

It is a really important part of our economy. They contribute just under \$51,000 to our economic output every single year. They are an incredible part of what makes the Territory the Territory. It is the second-largest service export in the Territory, and in 2024 generated \$287.1m in export revenue for the Territory. That is not insignificant at all; in fact, it is the Territory's sixth-largest export. From a business point of view and the work that is done by the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations—contrary to what the Member for Johnston may think—it is a significant investment and component for the Northern Territory. Based on the data that we have, nearly 6,000 international students have been enrolled with our education providers. That includes Charles Darwin University, their TAFE program and also our private sector providers. Not only do they contribute to the economy in the skills that they learn, but they are keeping some of our small businesses going as well.

Attracting high numbers of international students to the Territory is a critical focus for us, and we really have been successful in getting growth up to December 2025—we had a growth of 4.6% enrolments, which is 261 people. If you multiply that by \$51,000 you can see the significance of that.

Across the rest of the country the numbers had started to decrease. We will continue working really hard in that environment, and that is one of the reasons why we invest so heavily in Study NT. Study NT's job is to work with our international students to make sure that when they get here, they are comfortable and not just abandoned to try to survive a very new environment. They work with the students one to one. We have an amazing ambassador program where they do mentoring and support so that students who have been here for a period of time can then nominate themselves to support new students coming in.

The careers expo that was held earlier this year was attended by around 200 students, with 30 organisations taking part. That goes to show the absolute significance of this work in the Northern Territory. We host a range of familiarisation tours. We are making sure that we get good-quality advice for our students by working with migration agents so that we can increase the number of students who applying and approved by the federal government. It is an arduous application process, so it is important that it is done correctly. We have held industry roundtables with those people to make sure we get it right. We know what their demand and needs are.

One of the programs that we are excited about recently is the HOME program which is designed to wrap around students when they come into the Territory, so they know what to expect. We help get them settled, we help orient them to the Territory, we make sure that any challenges in their study program are worked through together and we also provide international education support grants for students coming here who may be struggling a bit. We work closely with some of the not-for-profit organisations that have been established over the years. Many people will know of Kindness Shake that evolved out of the COVID situation, where international students banded together to support each other and now has become an incredible vibrant and active support group throughout our community.

We are partnering with NT Cricket to promote the Northern Territory as a place to live, work and study. We have had incredible response from the exposure that has given us. We will continue to engage across all sectors to explain the benefit of international education. We will continue to work with the federal government to explain to them just how important international students are to our economy not just while they are students but as they progress through their training and decide this is the place they want to stay and live.

There are a number of areas they work, so there is excellent sector engagement. We have a fantastic higher degree program we have promoted. We are excited to see where this journey will take the Territory in the future. Truly it makes the Territory so special. It makes us who and what we are.

I thank you for being able to put that on the record, Member for Karama, because the investment by the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations into international education and support of international students is repaid tenfold by the work these students do and the payment they give us back in their commitment to the Northern Territory.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: it was great to see Study NT at the free broadcast of the World Cup on Sunday. I think there was 1,800 people registered there. Obviously, they were getting the profile and sharing it internationally.

Mr PATEL: I have a quick question, minister. I had an opportunity last week to attend Study NT international education and training Industry Forum in Darwin, and we had a lot of educational providers talking about international migration but at the same time education. They had some concerns about the latest Australian Government policy impacts on international students and education. They had a lot of concerns and feedback.

My question is: what are we doing for those educational providers to survive in the future in the NT?

Ms CAHILL: There is no question there is a lot of misinformation, more broadly, in the community across Australia as to the perceived negative impact that international students have on our economy. I am looking forward to the day the Australian Government runs a campaign that shows what Australia would look like without international students working and studying in Australia. There would be empty cafes, no uber drivers and a whole range of other services that people would not be able to get, particularly in areas like aged care and childcare.

These people are the ones making sure our economy continues to thrive. The Australian Government has made 31 policy changes in five years regarding international students and international education since 2021. People who come in on one visa and try to do one thing find out next week that everything has changed.

We need certainty, and we are advocating for that. We are reinforcing strongly to the Australian Government the positive impact international students have on our economy, lifestyle and population growth. I have met many families in the Territory where one or other of those people have been students who have come here and met the love of their life, married and had their families. They are now running businesses.

It is a critical component of who we are and what we do. Australia will be much poorer for not being able to have those people here. I thank you for mentioning the forum that was held, the international education and training sector Industry Forum. It is important those organisations that facilitate students coming to the Northern Territory also have the opportunity to talk about their concerns so we can then advocate on their behalf to the federal government.

There were some incredible participants. ISACNT was there, the International Education Association of Australia. The Koala and Insider Guides were there; these are two platforms that talk about where you should come if you are an international student looking for somewhere to take your next step in your learning experience. To have them there to talk about the Territory to their audience is critical. We work closely with Charles Darwin University to make sure we are aware of any challenges they have experienced.

One of the things that happens in the federal government space is we all have a cohort of students who have been applying for and granted visas under our international student education program quite consistently, for a number of years, who suddenly are being rejected because their country has somehow made it onto the naughty country list without any explanation or advice from the federal government around why that has happened or what the challenges are that are making it so difficult. It is critical that we advocate on behalf of those students. It is critical we work hard to make sure the pathway is secure and progresses smoothly.

It is critical for the businesses that are providing their education because they too make a significant contribution to our community and to the economy of the Northern Territory. It is who we are as a Territory. If anyone can tell the rest of the world what a true multicultural society looks like, it is the Northern Territory. International education is a key platform that assists us in doing that. Thank you for being at that forum and able to hear that feedback. The team will work closely to facilitate opening those doors much more easily into the future.

Madam CHAIR: That concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations. On behalf of the committee, I thank the departmental officers who provided advice to the minister. Minister, would you like to make a closing statement before we close off?

Ms CAHILL: The task that was set to the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations when it was formed when we came to government 18 months ago was a significant one. It was: how do we re-engage with our region, and how do we create opportunities in an environment that had been quite depressed to grow the Territory economy.

Every member of the team who has come on board and every person working within the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations has resoundingly accepted the challenge. Every challenge I have thrown at them, every obstacle they might think I put in their path and every question I have asked they have risen to the occasion. Nothing exhibits that more than the work that has been undertaken in preparing for this

Estimates briefing. It is a difficult time. It takes a lot of work and a lot of effort. It is a lot of detail, and I am sure that what they would all rather be doing is out there selling the Territory, selling the opportunity and making it clear to people why they should come, live, work and invest in the Northern Territory.

I thank them all, particularly the team around the table and all the people we cannot see who have been busily running around over the past few weeks pulling this information together so we can tell the Territory story the way it is meant to be told which is proactively upfront clearly. I personally could not be doing it without them, and I thank them very much for their efforts. Just wait until next year; the story will be phenomenal.

Madam CHAIR: We will break for the changeover and dinner break and resume at 6.55 pm.

The committee suspended.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Madam CHAIR: Welcome back. Minister, I invite you as the Minister for Children and Families and the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence to introduce the officials accompanying you today, and make an opening statement of no more than 20-minutes regarding the Department of Children and Families. I will give you a five-minute warning at the 15-minute mark.

Ms CAHILL: Thank you, Chair. I am pleased to appear before the Estimates Committee to speak to my portfolios as Minister for Children and Families, Child Protection and Prevention of Domestic Violence. I am joined today by the executives from the Department of Children and Families who are here to assist me. We have Mr Brent Warren, who is the Chief Executive Officer; Ms Rachelle McMillan, who is the Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Strategy, Programs and Enabling Services; Ms Karen Broadfoot, who is Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Regional Services; and Ms Cynthia Loganathan, Chief Financial Officer.

The 2026–27 budget provides \$392.9m for the department, an increase of \$9.8m from the 2025–26 revised budget of \$383.1m. This funding is essential for services that support vulnerable families, victim–survivors and those experiencing homelessness, and is a continued investment into the safety and wellbeing of Territorians. The department’s funding is directed to \$216.8m to support children and families, comprising \$49.46m in family support, \$23.95m in child protection services and \$143.4m in out-of-home care; \$77.7m to support people experiencing homelessness; \$63.5m for domestic, family and sexual violence prevention response and recovery; and \$33.9m for corporate, regulatory and shared services.

The \$33.9m for corporate, regulatory and shared services has been revised from the 2025–26 original budget of \$23.375m. This increase in the corporate and governance output reflects the centralisation of whole-of-agency corporate and governance costs that were previously allocated across outputs. The variation in the shared services output in 2025–26 is mainly due to the Department of Corporate and Digital Development’s revised cost allocation methodology post-machinery of government. This centralisation provides stronger accountability to clearly show where funds are used for corporate expenditure and for the delivery of services to the community.

The department has a 2026–27 budget of \$419m. This includes \$393m in operational funding and \$26m in infrastructure program funding. The department has a 2026–27 infrastructure program of \$26m, including the following projects: \$10.1m for the Tennant Creek Visitor Park under the Barkly Regional Deal; \$10m for the Darwin Visitor Accommodation Precinct; \$2.4m for women’s safe houses; \$1.9m for minor new works; and \$1.6m for repairs and maintenance programs for the department’s portfolio of assets.

I will now speak to each portfolio area in turn. Stronger families lead to better outcomes for children and young people and help build safer communities. During 2025–26 the government invested more than \$208.7m to support children and families across the Territory. This included \$41.1m for family support services that work with families experiencing vulnerability, disadvantage and complex challenges, helping them access support earlier and reducing the likelihood of children entering the child protection system. As of 31 March 2026, 480 family support cases had been opened. Our role is to support families early, strengthen parental capability, hold parents accountable and intervene when children are at risk.

One initiative supporting this work is family responsibility agreements, with more than 255 agreements entered into during 2025–26. In 2026–27 the family support budget has increased to \$49.4m. During 2026–

27, we will continue expanding this work as part of our commitment to addressing the root causes of crime and strengthening families.

Alongside these Territory funded initiatives, we continue to work closely with the Australian Government through the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment—NTRAI—agreement, and the national partnership agreement on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses.

Through NTRAI funding secured for 2026–27, the Territory will invest \$10.4m for remote women's safe spaces, \$8.2m for child and family centres, and \$5.5m for remote family support services. A highlight of the past year was the establishment of new child and family centres at Arlparra and Borroloola.

Child safety remains the department's highest priority. During 2025–26, our government invested nearly \$167.6m into child protection and out-of-home care services—almost 43% of the department's total budget. This level of investment reflects both the complexity of the work, and the importance of early intervention. Keeping children safe is the most important work we can do. The department works to keep children connected to family, culture and community, but when children are unsafe, statutory intervention remains necessary to protect them.

As at 31 March 2026, the department had commenced 3,027 child protection investigations, and 119 children had entered care. We increased the out of home care budget by \$10m in 2025–26, to support children and young people when they cannot safely stay at home. We are focussed on increasing the number of foster and kinship carers and have partnered with the Foster and Kinship Carers NT and Aboriginal Carers Services to establish a Carer Reference Group, giving carers a stronger voice in their partnerships with the department and honouring the support they provide to children in their care.

As at 31 March 2026, there were 462 registered carers, of whom 220, or 48% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Work continues to improve out of home care. As at 31 March, the department was undertaking an intensive procurement process to ensure young people needing intensive therapeutic residential care are receiving the best care and supports to meet their complex needs.

Recruitment and retention remain a key focus in an environment where attracting a skilled workforce remains a challenge. A recruitment community of practice and a dedicated workforce strategy, alongside targeted local and international recruitment campaigns have helped deliver some of the strongest workforce retention outcomes in recent years with vacancy rates of 25%, as opposed to previous years, which were between 34% to 42% vacancy rates.

We have also invested in a legal services upskilling program across the greater Darwin, Top End, Arnhem and Big Rivers regions with more than 200 consultations and reviews completed to support frontline workers in court.

Child protection practitioners carry ongoing responsibility for children and families over long periods, responding after hours and in crisis. That responsibility does not end at the close of a shift. I acknowledge the professionalism, compassion, and resilience of our frontline workforce, and Budget 2026 reinforces this government's commitment to protecting vulnerable children and supporting stronger families.

Domestic, family and sexual violence continues to have a devastating impact across the Territory. Too many women, children and families experience violence in their homes. This government is determined to hold people who use violence accountable, support victim survivors to heal, and invest in prevention and early intervention.

Our government made an historic additional investment of \$36m ongoing, per-year to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence, with allocations set out in the Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Reduction Strategy 2025–28 launched during the 16 Days of Activism campaign in 2025. Though one victim is one too many, a positive early result is a 9% reduction in domestic violence offences reported by Northern Territory Police, and we will continue to work to drive those numbers down.

During 2025–26 we invested \$8m into remote women's safe houses through NTRAI, with a further \$20.3m for frontline crisis accommodation and wraparound support services across the first two quarters of 2025–26. Clients spent more than 16,600 nights in safe houses across the Territory. Through the strategy in 2025–26 the department is investing \$22.8m in critical initiatives including \$6.6m investment for Circuit Breaker, \$5.2m to fund frontline specialist services, \$3.2m for community-based behaviour change programs and remote safe houses, \$2.6m for the co-responder model in partnership with NT Police, \$1.5m for the DFSB

training and resource centre, \$1.5m for whole-of-government policy coordination in governance, \$1.2m for primary prevention grants and \$350,000 for specialist courts.

A further \$13.1m has been allocated to partner agencies, including \$6.6m for NT Police to lead the family safety framework and co-responder model, \$4.2m for Corrections, \$1.6m for the Attorney-General's Department, \$400,000 for NT Health and \$250,000 for the Department of People, Sport and Culture.

One initiative I want to highlight is the Circuit Breaker Program delivered through our family and youth support teams. This innovative program focuses on breaking the cycle of domestic violence, provides intensive case management for children, young people and families experiencing complex challenges, connecting them with early intervention programs including parenting, education, housing and wellbeing supports before issues escalate to statutory intervention. The program now operates across all major Territory centres. As of 31 March 2026, 312 Circuit Breaker cases had commenced with 42 referrals to safe places. Budget 2026 includes a total budget of \$8.3m to continue and strengthen this work.

Looking ahead Budget 2026 continues significant investment including \$20.3m for a crisis accommodation and wrap around supports, \$4.1m for behaviour change programs, \$3.4m for primary prevention grants, \$2.56m for early intervention grants and \$1.5m for the DFSB training and resource centre.

A safe and stable home is the foundation for strong families, better health and improved health life outcomes. In 2025–2026 the Territory government invested \$74.6m in homelessness services, including crisis accommodation, transitional housing and support. This marked the first year of the Northern Territory Homelessness Strategy 2025–2030. Key investments included more than \$9.3m for assertive outreach across five regions, more than \$2.9m to establish the Territory's homelessness hotline, more than \$4.5m in housing support for victim survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence and more than \$2.2m for a new youth homelessness hub delivered through the Maloerroe-ma Pathway Program.

The homelessness hotline gives Territorians one number to call to connect with the right support, reducing duplication and helping people access help earlier. As of 31 March 2026 the hotline received 1,305 contacts, with more than 1,000 people supported through assessments, referrals, advice and accommodation assistance including remote support into Katherine and Tennant Creek. These services are delivered in partnership with organisations across the Territory, including Anglicare NT, CAAPS, CatholicCare NT, Larrakia Nation, Mission Australia, the Salvation Army NT, Yilli Rreung Housing and many others, connecting vulnerable Territorians with housing, health and social supports.

A 2026–2027 budget of nearly \$78m will continue this work. As custodians of public funds, we remain focused on delivering value and directing investment where it will have the greatest impact. During 2025–2026 the department undertook a review of grant funding and service delivery arrangements to reduce duplication, strengthen grant management and improve alignment between funding and government priorities. Underpinning all this is a clear and consistent approach. Early intervention protects families and children, saves lives and helps break the cycle of disadvantage. Too often systems respond only at the point of crisis. Whilst statutory responses remain essential, they should never be the first point of engagement when it is possible to intervene earlier.

Let me be clear: where families do not meet their children's essential needs, this government will act. This means strengthening community-based family support, integrated service delivery across agencies, whole-of-government approaches such as the family safety framework, co-responder models with NT Police and information-sharing reforms. It also means deepening our partnerships with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations who bring local knowledge, cultural understanding and trusted relationships that are essential to lasting change, particularly as we work to address the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection and out-of-home care systems.

Early intervention is not only a social policy priority; it is a crime prevention strategy. When we strengthen families, support young people and stabilise home environments, we directly address many of the underlying drivers of youth offending and community safety concerns.

Everything that I have outlined today reinforces the government's broader priorities. By strengthening families we will reduce crime. By supporting vulnerable Territorians, we build stronger communities. By investing in services and workforce, we contribute to building the economy. By improving outcomes for children and young people, we are restoring the lifestyle for Territorians that they expect and deserve.

Every day department staff work alongside children, families and communities facing some of the most complex challenges in the Territory. They do so with heart, commitment and resilience. I thank the executives

beside me, the department staff and our service partners and community organisations across the Territory for their dedication over the past 12 months.

It is a big job. It is a tough job. There is still much more to do, but this government remains firmly committed to supporting Territorians experiencing vulnerability and to building a stronger, safer Northern Territory.

I am happy to take questions on the opening statement.

Mr PAECH: Thank you, minister, for your opening statement.

I too want to acknowledge the important and valuable contribution that child protection practitioners make across the Territory. Could you provide the committee with the number of notifications that central intake received during the reporting period?

Ms CAHILL: As of 31 March, the Department of Children and Families have received 22,448 contacts about child safety and wellbeing. Of those, 9,442 (42%) were screened out because a child protection response was not required. The remaining 13,006 (58%) of notifications were screened in. Sixty per cent of the notifications, which equated to 7,753, were assessed as requiring a departmental response such as child protection investigation, Circuit Breaker or worries to be addressed in an open case. Additionally, 3,500 (27%) of notifications were screened in for further action in an already existing open case, of which there were 3,124 (24%) commenced new open cases. As of 31 March 2026, 1,080 child protection notifications were actively under assessment or pending referral to other department services and support.

Mr PAECH: Can you provide a breakdown of how many children were in fact subject to those notifications? I understand that there may be multiple notifications for a child.

Might I also indulge you, minister. There is a second part to that question which might help you in determining it. What percentage of children subject to the notifications were aged between two and four, five and nine and 10 and 14?

I wanted to put that out in case you needed to take that one on notice.

Ms CAHILL: I can advise that in terms of the notifications, we cannot break that down by unique children cases. If you look to the percentages and the number where there are open investigations that would give you some indication.

Twenty-seven per cent of notifications were screened for further action in an already open case. That would equate to those children already being in the system as a notification. That potentially will give you some concept of what that would look like.

In relation to a breakdown by age, that information is not something that has been collated. The advice I have is it is not possible to break down notifications by age groups either.

Mr PAECH: The CARE system would not allow you to break that down?

Ms CAHILL: The CARE system has many challenges. Providing detailed breakdown of data remains one of them, which continues to be worked on. At this stage, no, it cannot do that.

Mr PAECH: Are you able to provide a breakdown of the harm types that were screened in? What percentage were related to emotional harm, neglect, physical harm and sexual harm?

Ms CAHILL: Bear with me one moment, Member for Gwojja. I know I have seen it, I just need to locate it.

Mr PAECH: Not a problem.

Ms CAHILL: Apologies, what I recall seeing was the breakdown by type for substantiated claims. Obviously, that is where the focus is, particularly when you consider the large number that are deemed not to meet the threshold.

As of 31 March there were 64% of substantiated harms were emotional harm, 18% neglect, 13% physical, 6% sexual exploitation. I can give you unique children in those areas. There were 493 unique children who experienced emotional harm, 138 experienced neglect, 98 experienced physical harm and 44 experienced sexual exploitation.

If you wanted a breakdown for claims that were not substantiated, that would be a significant body of work. Did you still want that, or are you happy with this?

Mr PAECH: I am happy with that. I do not want to misquote you either. Was the number of notifications that have been substantiated is 13,006. Is that correct?

Ms CAHILL: That required additional investigation.

Mr PAECH: Of those 13,006, how many of those central intakes alleged family violence involvement?

Ms CAHILL: The 13,006 were notifications that were screened and deemed further investigation. Of that, just over half were identified as requiring a departmental response. That is 7,753. Of those, 34% or 4,370 had a DV content.

Mr PAECH: How many child protection notifications are there today? If that is not available, as of 31 March?

Ms CAHILL: That was the information I provided earlier. The notifications received, as of 31 March, was 22,448, 42% were screened out as no response required. As you would be aware, there are very well-meaning people who regularly make contact with the department, only to have it realised it is not really a matter that would fit the requirements.

Of the remaining 13,006 were screened in, and 7,753 of those notifications required a departmental response. Then 3,500 were screened in for further action in already existing cases. So about half of the notifications that were deemed to require investigation were identified as being children who already had an investigation underway. Currently, as of 31 March, 1,080 child protection notifications for actively under assessment.

Mr PAECH: What is the average time taken to commence an investigation, in terms of the child protection investigations?

Ms CAHILL: Each event that is identified as requiring further assessment or investigation is then prioritised and given a priority rating. Those ratings are across four priority areas, and those priorities are broken down. A priority one is required to commence investigation within 24 hours, the next level is two days, the next one is five days, and the next is 10 days.

Mr PAECH: What is the average time to complete an investigation?

Ms CAHILL: I can give you an average in that area. On average 13% of investigations are completed in under 42 days. I am sure you can appreciate many of these are very complex. The remainder are complete in over 42 days, that is 87%. Of the 3,361 cases that required further investigation, as of 31 March, 373 had the investigations completed in less than 42 days. The remaining 2,988 were over 42 days. Each of those would have had different priority ratings.

Mr PAECH: Just to confirm, how many investigations have been completed over the reporting period in total?

Ms CAHILL: 3,361, and just for added context, some of the reasons why investigations take a little bit longer in some of those situations is, sometimes it is hard to locate the family. The complexity of the investigation will require multiple levels of investigation. At times, there needs to be a lengthening of the investigation period, as they are working with NT police, relating to possible criminal charges.

Sometimes the investigation is being completed but administrative documentation is in the process of being finalised. Other times, the investigation has not been closed administratively, in the system, so it will remain open. That is where we sometimes get another notification that gets federal into an existing open case, which adds to the complexity of the investigation process.

Mr PAECH: During the reporting period, what percentage of investigations were priority 1, 2, 3 and 4?

Ms CAHILL: We can extract a report that will give that, but it is not data that is available at this point. If you would like, we can take that on notice.

Mr PAECH: I would like to, but if you would indulge me for a minute, can I ask a second question that we might be able to do as one? It involves the same kind of area. Priority 1 investigations which relate to harm to toddlers are meant to commence within 24 hours. What percentage of investigations met that timeframe? I can do that as a separate question or together.

Ms CAHILL: For clarification, the requirement to commence a priority 1 investigation within 24 hours is not restricted just to toddlers; it is any child who is classified as a priority 1. We can give you the breakdown of the numbers of children in the priorities, but not the age. CARE, unfortunately at this moment, and possibly never, can provide that breakdown, but I can give you the priority breakdowns by timeframe.

Mr PAECH: Are you happy if I ask you both those questions to take on notice?

Ms CAHILL: Yes.

Question on Notice No 8.3

Madam CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: During the reporting period, what percentage of investigations were priority 1, 2, 3 and 4? Priority 1 investigations, which relate to harm, are meant to commence within 24 hours. What percentage met that timeframe?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms CAHILL: Yes. If there is any way for us to provide you an age breakdown, in the complexity of the system we are dealing with, we will also endeavour to do that.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.3.

Mr PAECH: How many Strengthening Families cases were there during the reporting period?

Ms CAHILL: There were 130 Strengthening Families cases within the reporting period.

Mr PAECH: On average, what is the caseload ratio for the staff in the regions managing child protection investigations?

Ms CAHILL: As of 31 March 2026, there are 177 case carrying officers, and a total of 3,962 cases, which reflects an average of 22.3 cases per officer.

Mr PAECH: Last year in Estimates we spoke about how many children there are in the system and whether every child is assigned to a case manager. Can you confirm that every child is assigned to a particular case manager?

Ms CAHILL: The response is not dissimilar to last year. Not all cases are allocated to a case officer for a variety of reasons, but all cases, if they are not assigned to a specific case worker, are overseen by the manager in that region.

Mr PAECH: Do you have the number of cases that are currently not assigned to a particular case manager?

Ms CAHILL: Out of a total of 3,962 active cases, there were 272 as of 31 March that were not assigned. That basically means they do not have a lead carrying worker, but that does not mean they do not have somebody overseeing them. That would fall to the manager of the area.

Mr PAECH: To confirm, they are in the system, but they do not have a lead case manager.

Ms CAHILL: That is correct.

Mr PAECH: Of the 272, yes. I have more, but the Member for Johnston is waving at me.

J DAVIS: This is a follow-up from last year. In relation to the children who are in active care, how many of them have a care plan?

Ms CAHILL: You may be interested to know that on the back of your queries last year I too had some fairly robust discussions around how that looked. As we discussed last year, some of the challenges were around the implementation of the CARE system. What I can tell is as of 31 March, 87% of children have a care plan; 10% are in a transition to independence care plan; and a very small 3% currently do not have a care plan, which is a substantial change I think into what we were able to provide you last year. It will have to say it is an example of where CARE has been improved to be able to generate that information.

J DAVIS: That is relieving to hear. I have a quick follow-up from the Member for Mulka from the questions from the Member for Gwoja. You talked about the average caseload for child protection workers during the period. What is the current staffing ratio? That is not quite right expression for child protection. How many positions are vacant?

Ms CAHILL: As I stated in my opening remarks, the current vacancy rates are 25%, which is a substantial improvement on last year which I think was around 40%.

J DAVIS: Also from the Member for Mulka, does the department have a policy or best practice for the ideal caseload for child protection workers? How many families should a worker be case managing at one time?

Ms CAHILL: There is no specific number, but what is looked at is the complexity of the caseloads and ensuring that the appropriate case worker is assigned to the appropriate case type, so with the right skill set and right ability to manage. That is why there average per case worker. Some case workers may have much lower caseloads because the children they are caring for have higher needs, whereas other children may be doing well in the various placements that they are in, whether that is with kin, family, foster carers or whatever it is, and so the oversight of those cases is not as complex.

J DAVIS: I have one final question from the Member for Mulka. If the department were fully staffed, understanding it is now three-quarters staffed, what would the average caseload be?

Madam CHAIR: It is a hypothetical question. It depends on the cases numbers and the staff numbers and all that sort of stuff.

Mr PAECH: You mentioned before substantiations and notifications. How many notifications resulted in harm being substantiated during the reporting period?

Ms CAHILL: I am confident I have answered the question, but I am happy to indulge you.

Of the 79—sorry, 790. Seventy-nine would be great; let us aim for that number. Of the 790, 24% of investigations were substantiated. Then we had the breakdown of what that looked like.

Mr PAECH: How many children in care are on long-term protection orders?

Ms CAHILL: There are many pages of data here, Member for Gwoja.

As of 31 March out of a total 853 children in care, 459 are on long-term protection orders.

Mr PAECH: How many children are on protection orders with a long-term parental responsibility direction?

Ms CAHILL: I am advised that is not data that is available here, but we can take that question on notice if you like.

Question on Notice No 8.4

Madam CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: How many children were on protection orders with long-term parent responsibility direction?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms CAHILL: There is actually a differentiation in the way they are done. It might save us some time if I ask the deputy chief executive officer to give you what that differential is.

Mr PAECH: Yes, please.

Ms BROADFOOT: Sorry, I think it is a wording issue. Where we have long-term orders, that is the direction. There is a type of order you can have which is a protection order that has direction in it, which would be a tiny number, if we have any at all. The long-term order itself is ...

Mr PAECH: I understand. I am after with the direction order in it. I understand it might be low.

Ms BROADFOOT: With specific direction.

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Ms CAHILL: As indicated, it is probably a tiny number. To get to a long-term protection order there is a lot of work that has already been done. We will take it on notice and determine if we can extract that detail for you.

Mr PAECH: For clarity's sake, because I do not want to confuse or cause any uncertainty in the department, it is about directions within the order.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.4.

Mr PAECH: In the reporting period, what percentage of children in care reside in foster care, purchased home-based care, with family and kin, intensive therapeutic residential care, boarding school or other placements? I am happy to repeat the question, Madam Chair, because that is a few.

Ms CAHILL: It is okay, Member for Gwojra, I have you covered.

Of the 853 children in care as of 31 March, 97 were in family and significant other care; 181 were in foster care; 488 were in purchased home-based care; 40 were in intensive therapeutic residential care; 26 were in residential care other—I recently asked what that meant; it means that they are placing with family, so now I know—14 are in boarding school; and there is another category which is other placement types, seven, and some of those are often self-placing, in hospital or on holidays if they are lucky.

Mr PAECH: That is something you and I do not get to do.

On that, how much of the 2026–27 budget is allocated to home-based care, kinship care, foster care and the Foster and Kinship Carers Association? I am happy to extract foster care out of that if that makes it easier. I am trying to understand what the budget allocation is for purchased home-based care, kinship care and foster care.

Ms CAHILL: For clarification, are you talking about the 2026–27 budget allocation?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Ms CAHILL: Intensive therapeutic care is \$44m, kinship care is \$6m, foster care is \$11m and purchased home-based care is \$42m.

J DAVIS: This is a question on behalf of the Member for Mulka, and part of this has been answered. On 17 February 2026, the Member for Mulka submitted written question 198, and the response stated that those questions must be asked during Estimates. They are quite data heavy, and I note that you have answered some of them already. In the note it asks if you would be willing to take them on notice, given that they are data heavy, or you may be able to answer now.

The first bit has been mostly answered using the categories of care, and I think you covered all those categories. What is the data, and also the number of children, in each type of placement who are First Nations children?

Ms CAHILL: Is that the only additional question?

J DAVIS: I will read out the whole question. Please provide quarterly data for 2025, as at 31 January and as at 31 March 2026, on the total number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children who were in care. What is the percentage of those children who were placed with an Aboriginal kinship carer, an Aboriginal

foster carer, an Aboriginal purchased home-based carer, an Aboriginal residential carer or Aboriginal other carer and the number of children that have been placed with a carer in their home community?

Ms CAHILL: I will go through each of the areas where I have the data. I make the observation that we do not do it quarterly; we do it until 31 March, which is what the Estimates process indicates.

In the first instance we talk about intensive therapeutic residential care, which are the high-needs children, and 93% of the children in that intensive therapeutic care are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. With a number of those exiting that care, it is reassuring. For the actual number, out of the 40, 37 of them are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Ms CAHILL: Can I seek some clarification? I suspect the Member for Mulka is wanting to know how many Aboriginal children are cared for by Aboriginal kinship carers. Would that be his primary focus?

J DAVIS: He is interested in how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are in care in each of those categories, not just by kinship care.

Ms CAHILL: We will have to take the foster kinship carer question on notice. We have not got that breakdown. What I can tell you is that 27% of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care are placed with an Aboriginal carer, from the data that is available to 31 March.

J DAVIS: As a global figure?

Ms CAHILL: As a global figure, yes.

J DAVIS: Are you able to take the rest of those questions on notice?

Ms CAHILL: Regarding the number of children in community, we cannot extract a report on region. The system does not provide for that. I think I can give you the purchased home-based number. Of 488 children in purchased home-based care, 86%, or 421, of those are Aboriginal children.

J DAVIS: You answered Aboriginal kinship and foster carer and purchased home-based care out of ...

Ms CAHILL: No, we answered the intensive therapeutic care. It is the foster and kinship care numbers who are Aboriginal children—we do not have that breakdown here. We can take that on notice.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Johnston, could you please repeat the question for the record, on behalf of the Member for Mulka.

J DAVIS: For the reporting period, please provide the data on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were in care and placed with an Aboriginal kinship, foster or residential carer. Please also provide the number of children who have been placed with a carer in their own community.

Madam CHAIR: Do you accept the question?

Ms CAHILL: Just for clarity, we can give you a report on the children who are in the care of the department, that we have placed. There will be children placed in community who are not part of the care system, per se. So, we cannot necessarily give that breakdown. Children who are living in a community who may be with a kinship carer, we are not necessarily able to breakdown by region. We can tell you the number of Aboriginal children who are with Aboriginal carers in either foster or kinship care.

I have given you, for the intensive therapeutic care, the number of Aboriginal children who are in that percentage of care. They are very intensive, specialised care services. There may well be employees within those organisations who provide those services who are Aboriginal, but they are not placed in a care situation the same as foster and kinship care or a purchased homebased care system.

Similarly we can tell you the number of children who are Aboriginal who are in purchased home-based care, which I think is the number I gave you, but we cannot necessarily tell you which of the people who care for them are Aboriginal because that is a contracted purchased service.

One thing we can come back to you on is how many Aboriginal children have been placed in the kinship care system with kinship carers who are Aboriginal looking after Aboriginal children.

J DAVIS: The answer to the question, apart from Aboriginal kinship care or Aboriginal foster care—or is that outside your charter.

Ms CAHILL: It would technically be classified as kinship care if they are placed with an Aboriginal person.

J DAVIS: The figure you gave me on Aboriginal home-based care was not about the children about the workers, is that right?

Ms CAHILL: No, the purchased home-based care number I gave you were the children who are Aboriginal in purchased home-based care but I cannot tell you how many of the carers are Aboriginal.

J DAVIS: Which is the information that the member is seeking, so the only information you have that you can share is Aboriginal kinship care in terms of the carers who are Aboriginal.

Ms CAHILL: We are just extrapolating some other data we have that may provide the answer, but it will be slightly under-reported. With the purchased home-based care we cannot tell you the number of Aboriginal carers unless they tell us they are Aboriginal. I can tell you that kinship carers with 98 children who are in family and significant other care, 80 of those children are placed with an Aboriginal carer. I will go slow so you can write it down.

In foster care, 138 out of 197 children are placed with an Aboriginal carer. For the purchased home-based care it is almost impossible for us to tell, but we can tell you that 13 carers have self-disclosed they are Aboriginal and caring for 13 Aboriginal children. Thirteen Aboriginal children are placed with Aboriginal carers in purchased home-based care out of a total of 380. We do not have a record. It is just that those families have told us.

In intensive therapeutic care is zero. Other residential care, boarding school and other we do not necessarily have the full information because they are children who are self-placing, or they are placed with family anyway. If they are at boarding school, there may very well be some Aboriginal teachers there, but we do not have that data.

J DAVIS: On behalf of the Member for Mulka, please advise how many current Aboriginal children's placements meet the current Aboriginal child placement principle as prescribed by the *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007*?

Ms CAHILL: There is a bit of confusion around the section that relates to Aboriginal children. Those considerations are given to all children. With every child in care those principles are applied in a hierarchy of order of the capacity, as has been repeatedly said, placement with family is the first option, and then as close to community as possible, and then connection with community. The Aboriginal section 12 under the legislation, which is for Aboriginal children, those principles are applied in every case.

J DAVIS: Would the answer be 100% in that case?

Ms CAHILL: Yes.

J DAVIS: In relation to care plans from earlier, how many 15 to 17-year-olds have an active care plan?

Ms CAHILL: That was the number I advised with the transition out of care plans. Of the 853 children in care, 83 or 10% of those children have a transition to independence care plan. Those plans start at the age of 15. It will not be a breakdown of ages 17 to 18, because the process to transition to care commences once they reach the age of 15.

J DAVIS: For all children in care over the age of 15, what percentage have a current care plan?

Ms CAHILL: Ninety nine per cent.

Madam CHAIR: Can I just go back for one second, because we had a question on notice. I just want to check that has been answered for you, and there was no formal question on notice to be placed?

J DAVIS: I am pretty sure it has been answered.

Just a follow-up to that question, the Office of the Children's Commissioner reported that 56% of 15 to 17-year-olds did not have a current care plan. Is that incorrect, then?

Ms CAHILL: Your comment would be correct. Unfortunately, some of the data the Children's Commissioner was working off was not validated, and some was duplicated, so there was no clarity. My understanding is the department attempted to review that, but it has not been possible.

J DAVIS: 99% of children do have a leaving care plan, then?

Ms CAHILL: As of 31 March, the advice from the department is that of the children in care within that age group, which is the transition to care age group or 15 to 17 years old, 99% have a care plan in place. Some will be exiting out of an existing care plan because their care plan may have started when they were 14, and it goes for two years, so it does not finish until they are 16, at which point a transition to care plan will be initiated. Some have got to that point where they do start one at 15 just because of how the timeframes have worked.

99% of children between the ages of 15 and 17 years old have a care plan. Specifically, of that 99%, 41% are in the transition to care process, with the remainder having an existing care plan that will, as it comes to its conclusion, also become a transition to care plan. Those consider other things such as when you turn 18, where are you going to live, what are your job prospects, and so on. It encompasses a different range of criteria, whereas for much of it, particularly that 15 to 16-year-old age group, it will be things around education and training, which is already built into their existing care plans.

J DAVIS: How many young people exited out of care into homelessness, emergency accommodation, couch surfing, or temporary accommodation in the reporting period?

Ms CAHILL: The facts are that when a young person is exiting out of care, arrangements are put in place, so they have somewhere to stay. What happens after they exit, or turn 18 and are in a transitional process, many of them will make decisions about where they want to live and what they want to do. We do not have that data.

There are a number of non-government organisations that provide services into that area. You would be aware that there are a number of young people who are couch surfing and some of them might find themselves homeless. The department works to ensure that as they exiting out they have a strong care plan for the transition and somewhere to exit to. What happens after that initial exit—the work is done to keep connected with those young people but, as is the case for children in care, sometimes they do what they want to and it is not necessarily something that can be influenced by the department.

J DAVIS: When you say the work is done, does the department track what happens to those young people once they exit care?

Ms CAHILL: We have a track of young people who have transitioned out of care; they have transitioned to independence. As of 31 March there were 62 young people who would fall into that category.

There are a number of people in care where we have case management support continuum to be in place. As of 31 March 2026 the total number of those young people is 66. The majority of them fall into the 18 to 19-year-old age group. There is 52 of those and then it drops off after that. For 20 to 21, there is one person; 22 to 23 there are two; 24 to 25 there is one.

Madam CHAIR: We have one follow-up from the Member for Blain and then we will move back to the Member for Gwoja.

Mr KERLE: In the budget we are spending nearly \$167m or just over in child protection out-of-home care. We love to grow the pie rather than just divvy it up. Can you outline the work under way to grow the number of foster and kinship carers, with reference to the carer reference group you mentioned in your opening statement?

Ms CAHILL: Ideally, children would not need to be placed in care, but the next best solution is to place them into a family situation, Aboriginal preferably with kinship care and foster care being the other side of that.

I have been lucky to be able to do some work with the Foster and Kinship Carers Association of the Northern Territory over the last 12 months. They were clear about what they felt needed to be done to attract more foster and kinship carers into the system to help care for kids who find themselves placed into care.

One of the critical elements that we talked about was the training and support that is provided for people who would like to become foster or kinship carers. We partnered with them to ensure that they had a good, solid program. The Become a Carer Program, which provides carer assessment and authorisation assessments for carers so they know exactly what they are taking on, what the requirements are and we know everything we need to know about people who are putting their hands up to be kinship or foster carers.

The exciting news on the back of the work that was done—this was started mid to late last year—is as of 31 December, the FKCANT had received 77 new carer referrals, which was exciting, and had completed four new assessments, authorised four new carers and reauthorised 20 carers. We know that children are being placed with people who are well-equipped to care for them because that is critical.

The other thing we worked with them was looking at the resources we have provide to them. We have invested \$1.1m annually into FKCANT so that they can do that work with their foster and kinship carers and to support them. They are doing home visits; they have had 28 care meetings and 45 case management meetings that they have participated in. They are actively supporting our foster and kinship carers in their dealings with the department and making sure that the communication is good, challenges are resolved early and that we can work towards getting a better system for all those who are touching the child protection system.

All foster and kinship carers received payments based on the child's age and complexity. There is an extra remote allowance paid to all carer located outside the greater Darwin region. There is an establishment payment they receive with each new placement which is \$200, which is currently under review because we recognise the cost of living goes up. The carer authorisations are reviewed every two-years so that everything remains current. We are doing checks on the child placements to make sure the housing and arrangements of their place are solid, more importantly, that the carers, kinship carers and foster parents are well connected into the system so that they know where to go for help.

The feedback I have had is that the communication has improved significantly over the past 18 months, which is great news. We have a group between FKCANT and Aboriginal Carers which is a carer advisory group, which is feeding directly into the department providing advice and, in turn, they receive support around what is needed to make sure that we are attracting the right people and as many as possible who can help support children when they need it most.

Mr PAECH: I have some questions, but I would like to do a follow up from the Member for Blain. Was the CREATE Foundation—the peak body for children in care—engaged to be one of the co-chairs of the reference group?

Ms CAHILL: No. It was specifically for the people who were actively carers, that is why it is FKCANT and the Aboriginal Carers Association; they are the people who are on the ground dealing with it every day. They do great work in the area of supporting young as they transition to care. They have a strong cohort of young people who identify as Aboriginal, they have a number of advisory groups, forums and advocacy groups, so it is very much about the young people. Whereas the Carers Reference Group is about the carers support and assistance that they need to do their job. I know that giving a voice to the young people through the CREATE organisation has been very positive, and I have had great discussions with some of the young people who are involved in that group.

Mr PAECH: To be clear—talking about being on the ground—are you aware of the last time that the Foster Carers Association went into remote communities as part of a recruitment drive?

Ms CAHILL: I cannot tell you specifically what their activities are and how they program it. I am sure if you reached out to them, they would have no issue with letting you know how they are going.

Mr PAECH: How many children involved in youth justice also have a child protection involvement?

Ms CAHILL: In terms of the involvement for youth justice, that is not a question I can answer. That may be a question that the Minister for Corrections might have better coverage on. What I can say is that as of 31 March, we have four young people on protection orders and in detention it is 9% of the population. As of today, eight young people who are in care were in detention which is about 15%.

Mr PAECH: I missed that last part.

Ms CAHILL: As of 30 March, which is a slight difference to the previous 31 March. This is the data we have for young people who are in care or in detention. As of today, a couple of months later, that has increased to eight young people who are on protection orders, in detention.

Mr PAECH: How many referrals did DCF make to Aboriginal carer services during the reporting period?

Ms CAHILL: Between 1 July and 31 December there were 75 referrals for a combination of family finding and carer assessments, and 63 support services were provided to Aboriginal kinship and foster carers to care for Aboriginal children and young people in their home.

Mr PAECH: Is there any data beyond 31 December?

Ms CAHILL: It is a six monthly reporting framework, so we would not get the next lot of data until the end of the current period.

Mr PAECH: How many safety and wellbeing concerns about children in care were made to DCF under Section 83B of the Care and Protection Act?

Ms CAHILL: The total number for Section 83B inquiries was 49. No further action was 35 of that 49. Is that not right? My apologies, the other numbers relate to a combined 83A and 83B, but the 83B enquiries, there was 49.

Mr PAECH: Forty-nine, and just to be clear, that is 49 concerns not 49 children? Or is that 49 children?

Ms CAHILL: Forty nine enquiries.

Mr PAECH: How many children did those concerns relate to?

Ms CAHILL: In relation to how many children, whether there were duplicate notifications, that is not detail we have because we looked at the broader 83A which is the higher level of concern. If you like, we could take it on notice and give you the breakdown of how many children that related to.

Mr PAECH: Yes, please.

Question on Notice No 8.5

Madam CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: How many children do those concerns relate to?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms CAHILL: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.5.

Mr PAECH: How many notifications of alleged harm to children in care were made to DCF under section 84(a) of the Care and Protection Act? So we are still in the 80s.

Ms CAHILL: I do not wish we were. I can tell you that as of 31 March 2026, there were 177 reports made which were relevant to 166 unique children. There you go, I can actually tell you that for that one.

Madam CHAIR: It is now 8.15pm, we will break for 10 minutes and return at 8.25pm.

The committee suspended.

Ms CAHILL: I just need to clarify one thing that I said to the Member for Johnston earlier, if that is alright?

You asked about the Children's Commissioner's comments about care plans not being in place. We checked what she was talking about, and her concern was about current care plans, so every child has a care plan, but some of them are in the process of being renewed. That was the distinction.

J DAVIS: If a plan is being renewed, does that mean someone does not have an active care plan at that point?

Ms CAHILL: No. The care plan remains in place, but it might need updating. A change in age may need a change in requirements. We just checked to see exactly what the comment from the Children's Commissioner was, and it was not about care plans not being in place, it was about care plans requiring renewal. It is a slight distinction, but an important one.

J DAVIS: How many young people left care—for example, turned 18 during the reporting period, with a completed care plan?

Ms CAHILL: All of them.

Mr PAECH: How many children in detention had notifications to DCF and how many were substantiated?

Ms CAHILL: That is not data that we would collect. Potentially the Minister for Corrections might know, but it is unlikely.

Mr PAECH: If there is a notification, and that child is in detention, would you put that in the system?

Ms CAHILL: That is correct.

Mr PAECH: But you would not be able to produce a report with the current system to tell us that?

Ms CAHILL: A child may disclose a harm while they are in detention, and the harm disclosure would be investigated as per the normal process. It would not necessarily be recorded that they declared it while in detention. They would still be afforded the same level of investigation to make sure that when they are released, wherever they are going is safe for them to go. It would not identify the location of this disclosure being detention.

Mr PAECH: What is the cost associated with the placement of a child—per child, by house and region—in residential care?

Ms CAHILL: Are you talking about the cost for children placed in intensive therapeutic residential care?

Mr PAECH: Yes.

Ms CAHILL: As of 31 March, there were 36 young people in intensive therapeutic residential care. The expenditure at that time was \$21.318m. The budget was \$23.02m for the 2025–26 which is differentiated from the future budget because there is currently a process in place—36 kids, budget of \$23.02m with an expenditure of \$21.318m.

Mr PAECH: Is that data able to be broken down per house and by region? I am happy to take it on notice for you to provide the breakdown because some houses are small and some houses are big and some houses have multiple people in resi-care in them.

Ms CAHILL: It might not be possible to provide the detailed breakdown that is accurate because of the movement between houses. Again, some houses are smaller, some are bigger; some are fully occupied, and some are not occupied. I am not sure it is a piece of data I would feel confident giving to you in terms of its robustness because of the fluidness of the environment.

Mr PAECH: Would you be able to take it on notice to give me an average, not an exact figure?

Ms CAHILL: I could give you an average price per bed per year if you like. It is a range but it is a fairly succinct range which is between \$700,000 and \$750,000 per bed per year.

Mr PAECH: Of these residential care providers, are any of them registered as Aboriginal providers?

Ms CAHILL: No.

Mr PAECH: Can you provide a breakdown of the regions that these intensive residential resi-care operate?

Ms CAHILL: At 31 March 2026 it was Alice Springs, Darwin and Katherine.

Mr PAECH: Has there ever been one in Tennant Creek?

Ms CAHILL: The recollection is that there has been some arrangements in place in the past but nothing ongoing. As I am sure you can appreciate one of the requirements of these intensive therapeutic residential facilities is access and proximity to additional support and health care services so it would probably be not practical to have an ongoing one, but that does not mean it is not something that could not be looked at in the future.

Mr PAECH: Talking about the care register, has that contract been awarded and who is running the care development register? Did you say before it was foster carers?

Ms CAHILL: Are you talking about the carers reference group?

Mr PAECH: No, the care register development.

Ms CAHILL: I am reasonably confident I did not mention that because I have never heard anything about it. It is not something in the current budget process. It perhaps is something that might pop up next year. I did talk about the carer reference group.

Mr PAECH: Sorry, apologies for that. I want to confirm foster carers and kinship carers; are they assessed the same or are they assessed differently?

Ms CAHILL: They are assessed the same.

Mr PAECH: The financial support they receive is calculated on the same basis?

Ms CAHILL: Yes, because it depends on the requirements of the child so it does not matter who is looking after the child, the assessments are the same and the support provided as per the assessment of the child.

Mr PAECH: What support or compensation are children in care receiving when they are abused in government care, failed by the state?

Ms CAHILL: I am sorry, can you repeat that?

Mr PAECH: What support or compensation are children in care receiving if or when they are abused in government care and failed by the state?

Ms CAHILL: I am not sure if it is relevant to the budget Estimates. Every child is dealt with, assessed and supported in the same way. I do not see what the relevance is to budget Estimates.

Mr PAECH: Could you provide us with how many children have been engaged with the Circuit Breaker program during the reporting period? While you are excitedly flipping that folder, what percentage of children were aged from nought to three, four to nine, 10 to 14 and 15 to 17?

Ms CAHILL: For the current year to 31 March there were 312 Circuit Breaker cases commenced. The age breakdown—I do not have the toddler age groups, but under 10 three were 55 children; 11 to 12, 55; 13 to 14, 74; 15 to 16—my apologies I am reading the wrong column. That is the family responsibility agreements, which are also exciting, but not as exciting as the other numbers.

There are 134 Circuit Breaker cases for kids under the age of 10; 118 between the ages of 11 and 12; 157 between the ages of 13 and 14—this is over the life of the program—and 141 between the ages of 15 and 16; and 28 over the age of 17. We do not have the breakdown for the current period. That is the breakdown and gives an idea of the span of ages that Circuit Breaker are dealing with, which would be proportional in the number for the year from 1 July to 31 March.

Mr PAECH: Will you be able to provide the data of just the reporting period?

Ms CAHILL: Yes, we can do that; that is not a problem.

Mr PAECH: Would you like me to put that on notice, minister?

Ms CAHILL: Yes, that would be fine if you could do that because we have been looking at cumulative data over the period. We can break it down into the current period.

Question on Notice No 8.6

Madam CHAIR: Member for Gwoja, please restate the question for the record.

Mr PAECH: How many children have been engaged with the Circuit Breaker program during the reporting period? What percentage of the children were aged from five to 10, 10 to 12 and 12 to 17?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms CAHILL: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.6.

Mr PAECH: I also wanted to confirm whether there have been any children who have died in care within the reporting period?

Ms CAHILL: The advice is no.

Madam CHAIR: Member for Johnston, you have a follow-up question?

J DAVIS: To the Circuit Breaker questions.

Madam CHAIR: Are you happy to change direction?

Mr PAECH: I am happy because I have some more Circuit Breaker questions. Yes, you can go.

J DAVIS: I am happy to take this on notice because it is a lot of data potentially. Broken down by region, service and program, can you provide the committee with a detailed list of referrals from the broken, separated into children and adult referrals?

Ms CAHILL: I can give referrals by program, but it is not broken down by region because the numbers are not massive. There are 300-odd kids in the program for the year to date. In the current year to 31 March, there were 16 referrals to accommodation and housing support; 14 referrals to alcohol and other drugs; four to assessment referrals; 27 counselling mental health referrals; 24 domestic and family violence support referrals; 21 education school engagement referrals; 35 family support referrals; and 14 youth adolescent program referrals.

J DAVIS: I am also interested in the data for adult referrals from that program.

Ms CAHILL: These Circuit Breaker Program treats the family as an entity, so all those referrals would involve the parents and any other siblings who are in the household. It is treated as a wrap-around service with the design to try and break that cycle.

J DAVIS: Did you say it is not possible to give it by region?

Ms CAHILL: Correct.

J DAVIS: Why is that?

Ms CAHILL: It would require a manual collation by region support, which would be labour intensive, but if you want the staff to spend time doing that I am happy to take it on notice. I think you will find the breakdown of the numbers are reasonably small across the regions because referrals are often to centres.

J DAVIS: I am interested in specific services where referrals were made to. Are you able to provide that information?

Ms CAHILL: The specific referrals within the referral process?

J DAVIS: Specifically for 24 referrals to domestic family and sexual violence services; what were those services?

Ms CAHILL: We would have to take that on notice.

Question on Notice No. 8.7

Madam CHAIR: Member for Johnston, please restate the question for the record.

J DAVIS: Please detail the specific services referrals were made to in the reporting period.

Madam CHAIR: Is that just in relation to your inquiry around the domestic family and sexual violence?

J DAVIS: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms CAHILL: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated number 8.7

J DAVIS: How many domestic family and sexual violence risks assessments and safety plans have Circuit Breaker completed with victim survivors, adults or children, during the reporting period?

Ms CAHILL: We need to be clear about what the role of Circuit Breaker is, which is to intervene early and refer to other services. What happens once those referrals are made rests with those other services which also sits with other departments.

J DAVIS: Does that mean Circuit Breaker would not under any of those assessments?

Ms CAHILL: The role of Circuit Breaker is to work with families to get them back on track. For example, they might need housing support—or any of the other referrals that we have spoken to—but unless we follow up specifically about an individual at a point in time, that is not the role of Circuit Breaker. They would keep in touch with the family to see how they are going but in terms of the specifics of each other department's role in supporting that family, that would be a matter for those departments.

J DAVIS: To be clear, Circuit Breaker does not undertake domestic family and sexual violence risk assessments or safety plans?

Ms CAHILL: I think we have answered the question in relation to referrals domestic family and sexual violence because we have given you the numbers. The staff have all done the training, they know what to do and what to identify. In terms of enacting family safety plans, that rests with another department. We would refer on, and if an assessment is required, the referral-on would do that.

I think the critical element about Circuit Breaker is that the whole point of the program is to get to the children and families before those interventions are needed. Where referrals are required, it indicates a highly intensive situation that, perhaps, has escalated to a point beyond that initial intervention to stop the problem before it starts. That is what the goal is.

If we are going to stop the cycle of domestic violence we actually have to stop it before it starts. If you get to a point when you need a family safety framework, the horse has already bolted and there are significant issues in that environment, the Circuit Breaker team work hard to prevent the escalation of a situation before it gets to that, which is why the Family Responsibility Agreements are in place and why that wraparound approach is taken.

Mr PAECH: Talking about that funding, can you provide a breakdown from the DFSC strategy of how much of the proposed investments will be used for frontline delivery in regions outside of Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs? What is specifically invested in a breakdown of Barkly, Big Rivers and Arnhem?

Ms CAHILL: I am sorry, I missed that. You said the breakdown of the, and I missed it because you had your hand in front of your face.

Mr PAECH: Could you provide a breakdown of the DFSC strategy of how much of the proposed investments will be used for frontline delivery in regions outside of Darwin, Palmerston and Alice Springs? And what is being invested, particularly, in Barkly, Big Rivers and Arnhem?

Ms CAHILL: This strategy applies across the Northern Territory and it is broken into different programs. There are programs we can specifically say where they are operating. For example, Circuit Breaker operates across the whole of the Northern Territory. The co-responder model operates in Alice Springs and Palmerston, the Palmerston service has recently commenced.

When you talk about programs in communities, that is spread right across the Territory. The specialist DFV courts, that is probably where the C came from, currently operates in Alice Springs. We have been looking to implement a similar process, because of the success of that, into Darwin. Remote safe spaces exists in a variety of areas across the Territory, primary prevention, similarly across the Territory. The DFSV training and resource centre will provide services across the Territory, but it won't necessarily be placed in multiple locations.

Obviously, whole-of-government policy and coordination works across the Territory. Of the \$36m, if that is what you are specifically asking about, \$23.5m of that is controlled by DCF. It sits in our budget line, but there is an additional amount of money, around \$13m, that has been allocated to other departments, so it does not appear in our domestic, family and sexual violence line, to do the work that is their skillset. The NT Police has funding for co-responder and family safety frameworks. As you know, co-responder operates in Alice and has just started in Palmerston, and the family safety framework program operates across the Territory.

The Department of Health has an allocation for specialist health responses. We have been looking at how we can provide safe places in emergency departments, for example, for victims of domestic violence to be managed, and what that might look like.

The Department of Corrections has funding that operates across the corrections system, and across the Territory for programs in prison and counselling for women in prison. The Attorney General's Department has additional funding for specialist DFV courts and prosecution and witness assistance.

The Health department is looking at the capacity of the health system to recognise, respond to, and refer victim-survivors to after-hours specialist services, because currently that is not a resource they are able to access. As I said, the AG is looking at the specialist approach for DVFCs in local courts—too many acronyms—particularly around the prosecution and witness assistance support.

All the services that are funded have a network across the Northern Territory. For the major centres where a lot of the activity occurs—particularly the court system—that is not as dispersed, but certainly many services operate and are accessible across the Territory.

Mr PAECH: As a result of the coronial inquest, there was a recommendation for a 10% increase in frontline funding to those agencies. Is that featured in this budget, and is that going to roll out? I think that was an in-principal commitment.

Ms CAHILL: The 10% increase around the frontline services was included in the DFSV specialist service funding, so that was uplifted. We are looking across the board at where we are spending money and where the greatest need is, to make sure that we are spending money in the right place and redirecting as appropriate. We are keen to see the impact of the Palmerston co-responder model, which is a relatively newly established service, and if the DFV court system works and gets a better outcome for victims as they fight for justice, to know if we should do those in other places. We will be looking to uplift those. Frontline services had that increase, across a period of years, to look at that. Not just in the \$36m, but there is other funding we provide that makes up the total DFSV budget.

Mr PAECH: Are you suggesting that that has already been rolled out, where applicable, that 10% recommendation from the coronial?

Ms CAHILL: Where it is applicable at the moment in the DFSV space. We are currently reviewing the grants program to make sure we are spending money to deliver the outcomes the community expects and

redesigning those programs to get the best effect. Once that is completed, we will know exactly where the increase is required.

J DAVIS: I think I asked you about this in Estimates last year, and at that point you said the 10% increase to baseline funding for frontline services has been allocated. It was \$5.2m. To be clear, has that \$5.2m been paid to frontline services, or are you saying that is no longer the case and it is being reassessed?

Ms CAHILL: It is currently under assessment.

J DAVIS: What happened to the money that was allocated in last year's budget?

Ms CAHILL: All the frontline services that were about to fall off the funding cliff at the end of 2024–25 were continued, with the commitment that we would review all of those services to determine what was needed to be done in the future. It is critical that we make sure we are spending the money in the right places. There are significant numbers of service providers who have missed out in the past.

That review process has been a considerable and intensive process. It is nearly completion. Once it is completed those services will be supported, as we indicated they will.

J DAVIS: The \$5.2m was allocated in last year's budget. Where did that go?

Ms CAHILL: It is in the 2025–26 budget. It is currently in there and the 10% increase was part of that \$5.2m.

J DAVIS: It has not been spent in the 2025–26 budget or it has?

Ms CAHILL: It is in the process of being allocated.

J DAVIS: It will be allocated before the end of the financial year?

Ms CAHILL: That is the plan, Member for Johnston.

Mr PAECH: While we are on Circuit Breaker, will the ...

Madam CHAIR: I have not given you the call yet. You can have it.

Mr PAECH: I have been good.

Madam CHAIR: You have been very good. We have half an hour to go. Let us go. The Member for Blain has a follow-up question as well.

Mr PAECH: I am happy to jump straight there after this. Will the Circuit Breaker program be required to have the same review or evaluation as the rest of the domestic, family and sexual violence programs?

Ms CAHILL: That evaluation is currently under way.

Mr PAECH: For Circuit Breaker?

Ms CAHILL: Yes.

Mr PAECH: Will that evaluation be made public?

Ms CAHILL: Yes. Will we be celebrating Circuit Breaker? Most definitely.

Madam CHAIR: We will pass to the Member for Blain for a follow-up.

Mr KERLE: A quick one. This is a follow-up on Circuit Breaker. We talked before. I love seeing Circuit Breaker at the Palmerston Markets, walking around and engaging with the young people.

NT Police is reporting a 9% reduction in domestic violence offences across the NT. The Circuit Breaker that I see at the Palmerston Markets is probably the tip of the iceberg. I see them engaging with young people. Can you explain a bit more about the other aspects of what they do—those wraparound services with the families that is helping make Territory families safer? The things they are doing outside the Palmerston Markets that are driving these changes.

Ms CAHILL: The whole concept of Circuit Breaker evolved from you cannot continue to do things the same way and expect a different outcome. What was clear is that the first indication of a risk in a family situation is children out on the street unsupervised at all hours of the night.

Circuit Breaker's role, in the first instance, is to be patrolling and identify kids at risk. If they are at risk there is a reason for that. They wrap them up and transport them home and make sure that things are well at home.

Where there is a situation where things are not well and there is a risk to the child they provide a safe sleeping space for the child for the night. Then the next day, the day team goes in and sits down and works with the family to find out exactly what is creating the challenges they are experiencing.

It could be alcohol, domestic violence. Alcohol leads to domestic violence. It could be issues with housing that are creating tensions in the family. It is a range of issues. We know that the cause of domestic, family and sexual violence is multifaceted. It is a raft of situations that reach a culmination that result in some horrendous situations for the victims.

The first port of call for Circuit Breaker is to sit down and try to work with that entire family, which is to try to determine what is going on and how they can intervene before things go pear-shaped. That is where referrals to other services come into play and where the work is done to make sure that the environment remains stable and safe.

We want to prevent the creation of the next generation of perpetrator and victim. If we can work with those children at that point, then we have a hope of breaking that fairly vicious cycle.

Circuit Breaker started in Alice Springs and domestic, family and sexual violence assaults in Alice Springs have decreased 20% year on year. They have had the best outcome of the reduction in the approach of trying to get that community back on track across the Territory. Across the Territory, as you indicated, the reduction is 9%. Circuit Breaker is working with other programs, so they interact. Every night before they go out on patrols they meet with the co-responder team and other patrolling teams. In your area they meet with the PORU, they will talk to the local police to see what is happening and see where they can intervene.

I have been out on patrol with them where we have encountered domestic violence situations where they have de-escalated, made sure the children are safe and made referrals where they need to. It is an all-encompassing program that is actually working with the community to deliver results. The feedback from the community who participate is incredibly positive, and I am confident we will see, in the long term, that this one of the critical things that is working to help break that cycle of violence in our communities.

Mr KERLE: What is the budget allocation for Circuit Breaker? It might come under the budget allocation for domestic violence, and that will finish my line of questioning on that topic.

Ms CAHILL: The total budget for Circuit Breaker across all budget funding lines is \$8.3m.

J DAVIS: Given you just said in the evaluation of Circuit Breaker is underway, I am assuming that would include an evaluation of referrals. In relation to my written question earlier, could I expand or put in another question on notice asking for a list of referrals to all services broken down by region?

Ms CAHILL: To pre-empt you attempting to ask a new question, we would not be able to provide it by providers. We could provide it by services, but not necessarily by providers, because if you take a step back and think that some of the services provided are non-government organisations, you might have a variety of service providers. That is a far more complex piece of data that we would not necessarily have access to. We can talk about referrals to providers but not necessarily to services specifically.

J DAVIS: Can you help me understand the difference between those two things—an example?

Ms CAHILL: Providers are a group of people; services are multi-layered variations of a theme on different things that they may not have a detailed report on.

J DAVIS: For example, regarding AOD, would you say it is referred to an AOD provider but not the specific provider? Is that what you mean?

Ms CAHILL: No, you said the services provided, so we could potentially tell you who the provider of the service is, but not necessarily the nature of the services they provided to an individual.

J DAVIS: Okay, I am interested in the service, as in the organisation.

Ms CAHILL: We indicated we could do that and then you changed it to just domestic family and sexual violence, but if you want it all, we will give you a bonus for that. You do not need to ask another question. They can just do it. It is buy one, get one free.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.5

Ms CAHILL: If I may, I have an answer to one of the questions on notice from the Member for Gwoja in relation to 83B.

There were 49 section 83B inquiries received in the reporting period, and these related to 47 unique children.

Mr PAECH: What is the re-victimisation rate in the Territory where domestic violence victims have reported being attacked within two years?

Ms CAHILL: That would be a question more appropriate to the Minister for Police because it is a criminal action. We would not have that data.

Mr PAECH: You would not record any data about the number of interactions in terms of those statistics. They would lie with police or AGD?

Ms CAHILL: We look after children and their families where that is appropriate. In terms of victim reports and re-assaults, or additional assaults, on the same victim, that would be a matter for Police.

Mr PAECH: What new early intervention programs for boys, to address family violence and at-risk behaviours, has been established by your government in the reporting period?

Ms CAHILL: There is a range of programs that are funded that cover off a whole range of areas. For example, Aboriginal-led prevention, crisis accommodation and wraparounds support, which would take into consideration some young men's behaviour. The work that No More and Our Watch does is primary prevention and there are a number of programs such as: youth Night Social Activities; NT Council of Social Services do broader brush look at what is needed; Child and Youth Development research is done; and Keeping Women Safe in Their Homes programs which by their connection looks after the children.

There is a program specifically that will deal with your question, which I cannot actually talk about because it has not been announced yet.

Mr PAECH: Will that be announced before the end of the financial year?

Ms CAHILL: Highly unlikely, but it will be a great question for next year.

Mr PAECH: What family violence programs specific to addressing children's use or experience of family violence, have children been referred to through Circuit Breaker?

Ms CAHILL: I feel like we have already identified the referral pathways—the Member for Johnston asked specifically for service providers. I think the most critical element of our Circuit Breaker, when talking about the young people, is that we look to see what is going on in their family, if there is an intervention specifically required the assistance of other services.

There is also work done by the Circuit Breaker team in terms of referral to some of the youth work that is done within the department itself and some leadership mentoring work which they do. In Alice Springs particularly there is a very strong focus on keeping connected particularly the very young kids who they have found out and about on the street in less than appropriate circumstances.

There is a lot of work done with school engagement officers to try to get those kids back to school. There have been fantastic results where young kids, particularly, re-engage with school and get involved in much healthier peer support groups. It is a broad and individual personalised experience for each of the children they are dealing with.

In addition to that, there are intervention groups, which do one-on-one educational sessions with them, that focus on respectful relationships and consent. There are some programs which have been funded. NAPCAN, for example, developed a suite of resources that are being used. This is not specifically Circuit Breaker because it is a crossover thing, but there are resources that are available to the team that help teach young kids what safe looks like and being able to communicate concerns they have or if something has happened with them, how they can talk about it in a safe way to a safe adult.

There is work being done on emotional regulation and decision-making, safe use of technology and social media. I think one of the critical things for Circuit Breaker is that we are working very hard to keep children out of the youth justice system by keeping their families focused and together, and not creating that situation where young people are escaping from family violence at home and getting themselves into trouble as a result.

The real focus and the wraparound where it is not just about the kids but also about the families more generally is one of the things that is the most positive, I think, about Circuit Breaker. The uptake voluntarily of families to participate in the family responsibility agreements is a positive sign that families are stepping up and understanding that their kids deserve better and they want to work to make things better for them.

Mr PAECH: Recommendation 15 of the coronial inquest into the deaths of four Aboriginal women stated that the government should fund, and DCF should develop and implement, timely and intensive early interventions for young people who are reported as being involved in family violence, as victims or perpetrators, consistent with the Safe and Together framework. In an attempt to prevent further family violence these should be in addition to existing programs. This expands on action 3.10 of Action Plan 2.

What is the government doing to implement that recommendation?

Ms CAHILL: We are skirting a bit close to an area that I cannot talk about yet as much as I would, but then the federal government might pull the funding, so let us not do that. There is an announcement, particularly around those concepts that have been in development for a while. It is getting closer, but we are not quite there yet.

One of the things that is important too is that everybody who works in the Circuit Breaker team are in and of themselves trained youth workers, so they understand the importance of getting these kids on track and working with their families to keep them on track. To give you an idea of some of the work that they have done, for example, they work with services—back to your question, Member for Johnston, about the sorts of organisations that are working with this team. That includes Tangentyere family support services, back on track services which are critical. Some of those referrals are not necessarily formal referrals; they are connecting, so they will not necessarily be recorded because they all work together and the kids tend to gravitate towards the areas that they feel comfortable dealing with.

There was one young person who was referred to youth support. He has been attending weekly support groups and healthy relationship education sessions. Another young person has been supported by the team to engage with the local footy club and start playing footy each week. That might sound basic, but it is a total change of behaviour for that young person and created a whole new peer network and mentor support network which was missing from that young person's life.

There have been referrals—it is a great name, but I always say this wrong—to Onchiumpa cultural case management services. Another young person attended Love Bites sessions in the hub facilitated by the team to learn about what is a healthy relationship and what is not. This goes directly to the heart of preventing that creation of the next generation of perpetrator and victim.

The young people who have been interacting with the Circuit Breaker team are actively taking part in creating solutions for the future. One young person took part in the National Children's Commissioner focus group engagement and participated in the domestic violence session and was able to give real life experience to groups that sometimes miss out on that real life experience, particularly when it comes to young people. There have been referrals to headspace which is specifically set up to look after young people up to the age of 25 years with mental health issues.

There has been a lot happening and, to some degree, it is organic. That is because, as the program evolves, develops and finetunes and the, where things land, will almost create themselves. In relation to the specifics, ask me the question next year, and I will be able to tell you all about the program I cannot tell you about it tonight.

J DAVIS: What is the rate of unmet demand for domestic violence crisis accommodation services. How many women and children are not able to be accommodated?

Ms CAHILL: As you have clearly identified earlier, there is a lot of data here and a crossover between the safe houses and homelessness. I am checking which is the correct number to give you. My apologies; I know it is in here, but I cannot find it and will keep looking but if you would like give us that on notice?

Question on Notice No 8.8

Madam CHAIR: Member for Johnston, please restate the question for the record.

J DAVIS: What is the rate of unmet demand for domestic and family violence crisis accommodation services? How many women and children are not able to be accommodated?

Madam CHAIR: Minister, do you accept the question?

Ms CAHILL: Yes.

Madam CHAIR: The question has been allocated the number 8.8.

J DAVIS: To follow up on a question I asked last year in Estimates and coronial recommendation 35, which committed to establishing a domestic, family and sexual violence death review mechanism, where is this currently up to? When will the review body be operational?

Ms CAHILL: There is a commitment. It is part of our DFSV strategy and the commitment is for the second half of this year.

J DAVIS: How much funding has been allocated specifically to that? What budget line does it sit in?

Ms CAHILL: It will be funded from within.

J DAVIS: Is there no specific funding amount?

Ms CAHILL: It was identified there was no specific funding required. It could be managed from within existing resources.

Mr PAECH: We had a conversation last year in Estimates regarding the establishment of a DV peak. You confirmed then that it would not proceed, but there were two positions funded within NTCOSS which would do that advocacy work. Can you confirm this?

Ms CAHILL: There are two positions funded—one in NTCOSS and one in AMSANT—to do that work. In addition to that, we continue to work with a variety of providers in the sector and domestic, family and sexual violence victims as to where we gather that information from. We have a good resource of people to call on. In terms of the funding, one was with AMSANT and one was with NTCOSS.

Mr PAECH: The one in AMSANT and the one in NTCOSS, are they funded for the next full financial year?

Ms CAHILL: The current funding is to the end of the calendar year. There is still a bit of discussion regarding what the best approach is going forward within the sectors. We are still working on that. As part of our grant review and where we are spending money—to identify what the scope is to be able to do that work in the future, which will be done before the end of the year.

Mr PAECH: Are both positions funded until 31 December?

Ms CAHILL: They will both be funded until the end of the year. One of the positions is currently only funded until June, but there is an underspend, so we are allowing it to roll over while we continue to work on what the model should be going forward.

Mr O'GALLAGHER: Homelessness is one that we have not got to. This relates to my electorate too. The Maloerroe-ma Pathway Program, which you mentioned in your opening statement, at Malak shopping centre was announced on 3 February 2026 as a \$7.5m investment in youth homelessness delivered in partnership

with Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation. You and I had the pleasure of visiting it around that launch time, getting briefed on it and getting an understanding of it. Can you advise how many young people have accessed the hub since its opening, including how many have spent at least one night in emergency accommodation?

Ms CAHILL: I am sure you will appreciate it is a very new service, so in terms of their reporting requirements and actual numbers that have gone through in the period of time they have been open, we are not at their obligation to provide that, but I can provide you with some feedback on what is proving to be an incredibly successful program. The feedback from the young people who are using it and from the community more broadly is that it has been incredibly successful in distracting young people from doing the wrong thing and giving them something more focused to do and learning skills.

I was talking to the CE of Larrakia Nation, who are running the program, and he was telling me about how amazing it is that the young blokes come in and cook dinner for everybody and they learn how to look after themselves. They get a bed for the night if they need it. They are all engaging in proactive positive games. It addresses a critical service gap for young people in that 10 to 17 age group. Interestingly, the feedback that I have been given is that the kids who have been going there are spreading the word, so they are generally packed early in the evening with young kids coming there, finding it as a safe place to go.

It operates Wednesday to Friday from 5 pm and on weekends from 12 noon, which is great. It is a safe drop-in centre. The kids can get a feed. They get practical support, learning opportunities and recreational activities. I look forward to getting the first report to see just how many young people have gone through and what some of the flow-on benefits have been for them.

This is not proven data, but in the first little period of their operation they have had about 200 young people go through for respite and basic services. Their activity in terms of social engagement they reckon they have reached about 3,000 engagements, which is pretty exciting.

Some of the services they provide are practical. They have shower facilities and laundry facilities. They are doing some case planning with the young people. They are doing some cultural mentoring, and they too will do referrals to places for health, mental health support, education and so on.

It is a great initiative and early days, but looking really positive.

I have a couple of responses to questions on notice, if you will indulge me.

Answer to Question on Notice No 8.3

Ms CAHILL: Priority 1 where the requirement was within 24 hours, a total of 335 were completed. There were 337 unique children—and this is out of the total of 3,361. Within three days, for priority 2, there were 962 completed; that related to 905 unique children. Within five days 1,892 were completed; that related to 1,796 unique children. Within 10 days there were 125 completed, which related to 124 unique children. There are 37 investigations where the timeframes were not stated. That gives the total of 3,361 investigations and the 3,090 unique children in total.

Then, I think it was a two-part question. The response to Question B was that 65.5% were done within 24 hours, with the remainder of 34.5% done after 24 hours.

The answer to part C of that question is that of priority 1 completed investigations by age of child at investigation commencement, there were 40 under the age of one; 29 investigations for 27 unique children who were two; 16 investigations for children aged two; 19 for three years old; 10 for four years old; 12 for five years old; 15 for six years old; 14 for seven years old; 19 for eight years old; 18 for nine years old, with a total number of 17 unique children; 20 for 10 years old; 20 for 11 years old; 23 for 12 years old, with 22 unique children; 23 for 13 years old; 24 for 14 years old; 22 for 15 years old, with 21 unique children; 12 for 16 years old; and nine for 17 years old. That gives a total of 345 priority 1 investigations relating to 337 unique children.

Madam CHAIR: Minister, we are out of time, so we will get you to table your remaining responses now.

That concludes consideration of outputs relating to the Department of Children and Families.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister for appearing before the committee today and the officers who provided assistance to the minister.

That concludes Estimates hearings for today. Hearings will recommence at 9 am tomorrow, Wednesday 17 June with questions to the Attorney-General.

Minister, would you like to make a closing statement?

Ms CAHILL: I thank the team who are at the table with me. Doing the work to care for our children and families in the Northern Territory is a big job. As you can see, it is a data-intensive job. The requirements needed are quite significant.

A big thank you to all on the team who have been working behind the scenes. Some of them are sitting behind them, some are hiding out there and some are home in bed—lucky them. It is a massive effort to do this work. It is at times incredibly confronting; at other times rewarding in all of the areas in between. Thank you to every member of the Department of Children and Families team. Thank you to the executive for the work they have done. You can be proud of that work. There are many children who are much safer today than they were yesterday because of the work that you are doing.

Madam CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I thank the committee for behaving tonight ...

Mr PAECH: Best session all Estimates.

Madam CHAIR: It was nice, thank you. Minister, specifically, thank you. It has been nice that you have been able to provide so much contextual information to the data that has been provided today and talk through that. Thank you for your efforts and to the team. Good night.

The committee suspended.
