

Deputy Chairman; Hon Norman Moore; Hon Graham Giffard; Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich; Hon Barbara Scott; Hon Jon Ford; Hon Alan Cadby; Hon Dr Chrissy Sharp; Hon Barry House; Hon Ed Dermer; Hon Derrick Tomlinson

Division 63: Education Services, \$178 528 000 -

Hon Kate Doust, Deputy Chairman.

Hon G.T. Giffard, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education.

Mr P. Albert, Acting Chief Executive Officer.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the Legislative Council Estimates Committee, I welcome you to today's hearing. Government agencies and departments have an important role and duty in assisting Parliament to scrutinise the budget papers on behalf of the people of Western Australia. The Committee values that assistance.

Members are asked to sit towards the front of the Chamber where practicable, so that the witness will not have to turn his head when answering questions. It will greatly assist Hansard if when referring to the *Budget Statements* volumes or the consolidated fund estimates, members give the page number, item, program, amount, and so on in preface to their questions. If supplementary information is to be provided, I seek your cooperation in ensuring that it is delivered to the Committee's clerk within five working days of receipt of the questions. An example of the required Hansard style for the documents has been provided to your advisers.

May I remind those members of the public in attendance that only accredited media representatives may take notes. However, full Hansard transcripts will be available to the public within a week of the close of these hearings.

The Committee reminds the agency representative to respond to questions in a succinct manner and to limit the extent of personal observations. Has the witness read, understood and completed the Information for Witnesses form?

Mr ALBERT: Yes.

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Do you fully understand the meaning and effect of the provisions of that document?

Mr ALBERT: Yes.

Hon N.F. MOORE: I refer to page 1100 of the *Budget Statements*, and the decisions made since the state election. Was the decision to cancel the Claremont education precinct development made on political or educational grounds? What are the reasons behind the decision? What is the future of the Claremont campus as a result of the Government's decision?

Hon G.T. GIFFARD: The Government has no plans to proceed with the Claremont education precinct proposal developed by the previous Government. However, the Government is mindful that Edith Cowan University has indicated that it would like to see some development of the area. Discussions have been held, but the precinct will not be developed as envisaged by the previous Government.

I will take the first part of the question on notice. I need the guidance of the minister in that respect.

Hon N.F. MOORE: Can Mr Albert not help?

Mr ALBERT: Within the first two weeks of the new Government's coming to office, we were advised by State Treasury that that project would be cancelled.

Hon N.F. MOORE: It is a great shame. It was a very good project and the Government has made a mistake.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I refer to page 1103 and the major achievements for 2000-01. Drafting instructions are being developed for a Bill to establish a teacher registration body to be known as the Western Australian College of Teaching. What will it do and what is the likely outcome?

Mr ALBERT: The Bill is being drafted in consultation with a range of stakeholders. It will deal with the registration of teachers. More than that, it will establish a body that will set standards for the teaching profession. That body will liaise closely with the providers of teacher education - the universities in particular - and specify the standards expected of teachers. It will also set standards for professional development. It will be more than just a body that registers teachers. It will be concerned with the profession of teaching. It will promote the profession within the community.

[12.40 pm]

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Will it be applicable to both the government and non-government education sectors?

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Mr ALBERT: All people who teach in schools will be required to be registered with that body.

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: Yet another excellent initiative of the previous Government.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I do not think so.

Hon B.M. SCOTT: The first dot point at page 1100 refers to the new school entry age from this year resulting in a reduced cohort of students entering kindergarten at some non-government schools. What budgetary allocations have been made to the non-government sector to help reverse the low enrolment levels caused by the new school entry age in 2001?

Mr ALBERT: No specific allocation has been made. Assistance packages exist for schools that experience problems. Schools must apply for the assistance.

Hon B.M. SCOTT: Page 1100 refers to special payments by the Government to assist schools with low enrolment levels.

Mr ALBERT: On application.

Hon B.M. SCOTT: I understood from the non-government sector that all schools would be compensated. Is it for all schools with low enrolments?

Mr ALBERT: Provided they meet the criteria. If they experience a drop in enrolment levels, schools will be compensated. Evidence suggests there are not too many schools.

Hon B.M. SCOTT: Is that just for next year?

Mr ALBERT: It continues for four years.

Hon JON FORD: I refer to the major initiatives for 2001-02 at page 1103. The second dot point refers to advice being provided on the expansion of opportunities for access to higher education for people living in the rural and remote parts of the State. Could I have more details?

Mr ALBERT: The department has a rural education advisory council that is very active in identifying issues associated with providing opportunities for people living in rural and remote areas. It covers the full spectrum of education and training. It includes schools, training organisations and universities. It has developed a strategic plan for the provision of opportunities and strategies to deal with identified issues. It has a process for monitoring the implementation of the plan. The key providers are the universities, the Catholic Education Office, the Department of Education, the Department of Training and the Association of Independent Schools. They have signed the plan and agreed to implementation of the strategies. We do not know how effective the strategies will be, but one of the functions of the council is to monitor it and advise the agencies on the effectiveness of the strategies.

The dot point refers to Geraldton. The Commonwealth Government has awarded 20 additional higher education places in Geraldton. We have coordinated a bid from the University of Western Australia, Edith Cowan University and Curtin University to the Commonwealth Government for the universities to collectively offer places in Geraldton.

Hon ALAN CADBY: I refer to page 1103 of the *Budget Statements*. I do not believe that the proposed Western Australian college of teaching will do anything to improve the status of teaching; however, it will have other benefits. The fifth dot point refers to attracting additional commonwealth funds for higher education in Western Australia. Prior to the framing of the budget, did the Government have discussions with the tertiary institutions on using payroll tax as leverage for commonwealth funding? If so, why did the Government decide not to proceed with the proposition, after agreeing, when in opposition, that it was a good idea?

Mr ALBERT: I do not know the answer because it was prior to the new Government coming into office.

Hon ALAN CADBY: I would like my question put on notice.

Hon CHRISTINE SHARP: What is the decision behind the boarding away from home allowance listed at page 1100?

Mr ALBERT: The administration of the boarding away from home allowance has been transferred to the Department of Education.

Hon CHRISTINE SHARP: What about the level of appropriation?

Mr ALBERT: My understanding is that the level of appropriation is indexed. The figures shown account for previous provisions and an indexed amount.

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Hon BARRY HOUSE: Last year, in my role as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education, I was assisted by Mr Bruce Keane - who I believe now works for the Premier - and personnel from the Department of Sport and Recreation in developing a project in Port Hedland. It involved the joint development of programs and facilities between the Hedland Senior High School, TAFE, Pundulmurra Aboriginal College and the Town of Port Hedland. It was aimed at encouraging educational attendance and outcomes with young Aboriginal people through their interest and ability in sport. I can see no reference in the budget papers to the program. Has the initiative been ignored or dropped completely? What has happened to it?

Mr ALBERT: The initiative is still under discussion. The Department of Sport and Recreation, the Department of Indigenous Affairs and the Department of Education met with my department to see what could be done to put the initiative in place. There is no outcome as yet.

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I urge the Government to take up the initiative and follow it through.

[12.50 pm]

Hon E.R.J. DERMER: I refer to the list of major policy decisions on page 1100 which includes the low interest loans scheme interest subsidy. I am encouraged, because \$1.2 million has been allocated for 2001-02, which will steadily increase to \$3.5 million in the forward estimate for 2004-05. I understand there has been a backlog in loan applications. It would be logical for the increase in funding to be the result of a specific policy decision made by the Government to address that backlog. I would be grateful for confirmation or otherwise of that explanation for the increase. I would also like some advice about any additional reasons for the increase.

Mr ALBERT: The previous Government's policy for the low interest loans scheme has been endorsed by the current Government and is proceeding on the same basis. The increase is due to the expected increases in interest rates. We have an arrangement with Treasury, which advises our department of likely movements in interest rates. That money caters for some possibilities in interest rate movements. The scheme is at exactly the same level as it was previously.

Hon E.R.J. DERMER: It seems to me that the increases are very large for an adjustment of interest rates. They move from \$1.2 million to \$1.7 million for the years 2001-03.

Mr ALBERT: Currently, the actual level of outstanding loans is \$184 million, and it is expected to rise to about \$220 million during that time.

Hon E.R.J. DERMER: Is that particular line item the adjustment?

Mr ALBERT: Yes.

Hon E.R.J. DERMER: I would like advice about any differential trends in demand between the primary school and the senior school sector, and also between the Catholic and independent school sectors. Have any patterns emerged of changing demand? That question could perhaps be taken on notice.

Hon G.T. GIFFARD: We will take that question on notice.

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: Perhaps the Deputy Chairman will give me some advice. A couple of years ago, there was an unholy alliance between the Curriculum Council and the Department of Education Services, which was never consummated. Are we allowed to ask questions about the Curriculum Council, or only Department of Education Services?

The DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Education Services.

Hon DERRICK TOMLINSON: In that case, I refer to the significant issues and trends on page 1099. The fourth dot point states -

The strategic plans for the development of Aboriginal education and training and rural and remote education and training need to be monitored and revised and initiatives implemented to achieve planned outcomes.

Has the Government given a commitment to continue the Aboriginal Education and Training Council and the Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council? Is there a similar commitment to the continued existence of the Early Childhood Education Council? What is the annual cost of the maintenance of each of those councils?

Mr ALBERT: The three councils referred to are currently being reviewed, as required by the machinery of government proposals. The indications are that the review will recommend the continuation of those bodies, albeit that there may be some slight alteration in their terms of reference. That is pleasing because it means the review has indicated that those bodies have been adding value to education and training. The Aboriginal Education and Training Council receives a substantial amount of funding from the Commonwealth

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Government - in the order of \$360 000. The Early Childhood Education Council and the Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council are funded by the Department of Education Services. The department does not provide them with much money; they are allocated approximately \$20 000 each, plus some staff assistance.

Sitting suspended from 12.55 to 2.00 pm