

**EDUCATION AND HEALTH
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**AN INQUIRY INTO IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES
FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIANS OF ALL AGES**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2011**

SESSION ONE

Members

**Dr J.M. Woollard (Chairman)
Mr P.B. Watson (Deputy Chairman)
Mr P. Abetz
Ms L.L. Baker
Dr G.G. Jacobs**

Hearing commenced at 10.05 am**BRAHIM, MR KEVIN****State Manager, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: On behalf of the Standing Committee on Education and Health I would like to thank you for your interest and your appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in gathering evidence for its inquiry into improving educational outcomes for Western Australians of all ages. The Standing Committee on Education and Health is a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of WA. This hearing is a formal proceeding of Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house. As this is a public hearing, Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any document or documents during your evidence, it will assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record. Before we proceed to the questions we have for you today, I need to ask you a series of questions. Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

Mr Brahim: I have.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to a parliamentary committee?

Mr Brahim: I do.

The CHAIRMAN: Did you receive and read the “Information for Witnesses” briefing sheet provided with the “Details of Witness” form today?

Mr Brahim: I did, and I have.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness at today’s hearing?

Mr Brahim: None at all.

The CHAIRMAN: In that case, would you please state your full name and the capacity in which you appear before the committee today?

Mr Brahim: My name is Kevin Brahim. I am the state manager of the commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. I am appearing here as the state manager.

The CHAIRMAN: Kevin, you have had an opportunity to look at our very broad terms of reference.

Mr Brahim: Yes, I have.

The CHAIRMAN: We are hoping that, having had that opportunity to look at those terms of reference, you might discuss how your department fits into whichever those terms of reference they fit into.

Mr Brahim: I understand that you have travelled to Canberra in the last week or so and you have met with my national office colleagues. Obviously I have had a bit of dialogue to make sure I am not repeating what they have said. They have sent you some information as well, as I understand. I am hoping it is useful. I suggest that maybe you will require further information as a result of that or want to know maybe about the practical implications on the ground. Obviously Canberra sets the policy; the state offices by and large deliver the policy. That is, I suppose, the differentiation between the national office in Canberra and the state office. I have a number of regional offices as well in terms of the delivery mechanism. I understand that our national office has briefed the committee to some extent about commonwealth–state relations in terms of education. Our portfolio

covers early childhood, which includes child care, right through to employment. The terms of reference do not cover workplace relations directly. There may be some implications for workplace relations, who knows, around teacher attraction in remote areas; I am not quite sure. That is probably a bit of a long bow to draw, but apart from the health elements, for which we have indirect responsibility, I think our portfolio covers almost all of your terms of reference.

The CHAIRMAN: Shall we then maybe ask you if you would not mind starting with, I think, number five on our terms of reference, which is the disenfranchised year 11 and 12 students. What is being done? Apart from yourself, what you are doing, who are the other agencies involved in this area? We now have a lot of people who are meant to stay on for those final years who really are not interested. We want to find what other options and courses there are for those people.

Mr Brahim: My understanding is that you were sent some examples of some of our programs around our Youth Connections program and our community and business partnership program.

The CHAIRMAN: But we were not told who provides the case management, who the referrals come from, what outreach activities there are from this in metropolitan and rural areas et cetera. So if you can now bring that back, as you said.

Mr Brahim: Just looking at the different responsibilities between the commonwealth and the state, the best way, I think, to describe it is that things that happened within a school environment, the schoolyard, is very much the state's responsibility constitutionally. Outside of the schoolyard, the commonwealth has a delivery interest in. We might have some interest within the school environment for national policies, national curriculum et cetera, but by and large it is a state responsibility. Actually keeping the students at school longer is a state responsibility. Once the students are disengaged, the commonwealth becomes involved. Our youth connections program is an example of that. In WA —

Mr P.B. WATSON: Kevin, can I just ask one thing: do you have a good working relationship with the education department over here?

Mr Brahim: We do. You were told about the national partnership that we have. That is the umbrella governance arrangement that ties it all together. It is fair to say that it is a very busy space. A good example of how busy it is is if you have a look at the focus we are currently having in Kwinana, as a practical example. Kwinana, for the Australian government, is a priority area for employment. We have a local employment coordinator position that has been rolled out. It is the only one in WA, so there are a number of those nationally. That is where we are trying to have intensive engagement. The steering committee that drives that has indicated, and youth unemployment data tells us, that is a significant issue—so the school to work transition is a significant issue in that area, despite the labour shortages that we are experiencing in the state. What we found is that, because there is a focus in the Kwinana region, governments are not the only bodies that are interested. The third sector is becoming interested as well, so there is a significant presence of the third sector.

The CHAIRMAN: Non-government organisations.

Mr Brahim: Yes, non-government organisations primarily. Primarily they are not-for-profit. Some are state-based and some are actually coming over from the eastern states to provide services. While governments may engage these third parties to provide services, including the local government, we are also finding that the non-government sector is actually engaging some of these third parties. Industry, for example, is engaging third parties to deliver these types of services. In the Kwinana area, no-one at this point in time has a good handle on what is being done in terms of this cohort. So we are trying to do some mapping, as it is very busy.

If you use that as a template across the state, it shows that I do not think any organisation is in a position to actually pinpoint all the providers, because it is not just government providing these services. We had some budget announcements at a recent budget around teen parenting, where we

are trying to do wraparound services for young parents—primarily females but we can have young male parents as well—that are totally disengaged. It is trying to re-engage them. A lot of them are actually school-aged parents. We are trying to re-engage them. Obviously that is not just a schooling issue. Some of them may not necessarily want to go to school; it may not be appropriate. Schools may not cater for this cohort. How do they get social services et cetera? Government is trying to do that wraparound service, and as a result of that budget initiative, we are actually finding that there are about three or four commonwealth agencies involved in this, so it is pretty complex, let alone state agencies. Once you throw that third sector in, it becomes hugely complex, because what we are finding is that there are a lot of providers that are actually in the market in that small location that we did not know about before.

Translate that to, say, the Pilbara: if you have the resources sector companies, they are heavily involved in supporting, particularly around the Indigenous students, which I understand is what your focus area is as well, where they are actively engaging the third sector in provision of services.

The CHAIRMAN: So you are trying to put together a resource territory so that schools know who is out there and who can assist with what. How are you planning on doing this to make it of maximum benefit?

Mr Brahim: I think what we first want to do is understand what the problem is before we actually land on a product. It is mapping for the purposes of this trial in Kwinana: if we are trying to be wraparound services for this cohort, let us find out about what services are available and who is providing them. That is a no-brainer. I am on the reference group for this. What we would no doubt head towards is: is this a template that we can use elsewhere? What is the use for the data? Part of the solution could be actually the schools may have a lot of this data themselves in a local area, but it may not necessarily be holistic across a whole region. So we do not know what the product is, but we are going through a process of identifying what the information is telling us.

The CHAIRMAN: But you know the numbers in specific areas. We are saying, you know, students need help in years 11 and 12. Do you have knowledge of how many students in those years in schools in Kwinana really have switched off?

Mr Brahim: We get the data from the education department and if there is non-government as well. We rely on the primary source of that data, which is the schools, to provide that to us. That would be the biggest data source we would have. We also have access to Centrelink data, which tells us those who are not in the school gate; those who are outside the school gate but are of school age. We can actually extract —

Mr P.B. WATSON: How do you pick them up if they are Youth Allowance and things like that?

Mr Brahim: They might be on Youth Allowance. Some people may not qualify for Youth Allowance that we can pick up through other mechanisms. There may be people who register for support through our job service network, Job Services Australia. They may not be on income support at all, because they may be living at home or something like that, but they do want to get support and get a job. They will not be in the school data, they will not be on the Centrelink data, so we have to combine all that data. At the moment, for the Kwinana area, we have developed a database to try to get the characteristics of individual jobseekers and the collectives as well. So if they are, for example, aged between 15 and 24 and they are female with children at a particular age, what are the characteristics of that age group and what support would they need to actually fully participate, whether it be in further training, re-engagement into school or into work?

The CHAIRMAN: Coming back to where you said other mechanisms, and you said you get data from the education department, how do we get that data? Who do we ask? What data do we ask for? Obviously that is one of the terms of reference for this inquiry, so we need to know how we get that data. What are the questions that we need to be asking?

Mr Brahim: The Department of Education would have that.

The CHAIRMAN: But when you say that the Department of Education has that, what I am asking you is: what are the questions that we put to the Department of Education to give us that data? You know that data is there and you know what you are asking for. What are we asking for? We do not come from the education background. How do you find that data? What are the questions to get that data?

Mr Brahim: The point-in-time data would be useful in terms of how many students are in each school by age group and year group, but also having a look at, historically, what the enrolment rates were in terms of retention, because if people are dropping out, the education department will not have that data, but that person who dropped out, say, this year would have been in compulsory school three years ago. They will also have a database on people who are—I am not quite sure of the terminology, because I do not work for the education department—approved to actually not be engaged in the education system. You have to apply for that, and they have that data as well. They will have some data of people outside of the school gate that will identify those students who actually have been approved, because school is compulsory, so if people do not turn up, they need an excuse not to.

[10.15 am]

Mr P.B. WATSON: That is my next point. How effective are truancy officers and are there enough of them?

Mr Brahim: I do not think I am in a position to say because we do not fund them.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Do you get any feedback on that area? We have one truancy officer for the Great Southern with all these schools. I am just wondering how they are picking up the kids who are supposed to be at school but who are not at school, so that they do not claim the benefits. Those kids have just gone missing.

Mr Brahim: I do not have the information to adequately answer that. One thing that historically has been an issue on the Indigenous sides is the mobility of the Indigenous students. Obviously the tracking of the students becomes an issue, whether it is truancy or whether the Department of Education has the mechanisms set up to transfer students' records between schools. It is not just an Indigenous issue, but is a consideration given the mobility of Indigenous students relative to non-Indigenous students. People may go by different names, and when they move, it is difficult to track whether they are attending school. As a result, I suspect that in some locations the attendance rate data, potentially, would not be 100 per cent correct because of the reasons I have just indicated.

Mr P.B. WATSON: I was hooking that to what is happening at the moment with kids roaming the streets. Obviously they should be at school and no-one is picking it up.

Mr Brahim: Our Youth Connections program, which we fund with the support of the state government, tries to get some of these students re-engaged, but it is not aimed at, for example, primary school. In some locations the disengagement begins much earlier. If the state government has a mechanism to pick that up, I am not aware of it; they may have, and the truancy offices may be one of those mechanisms.

The CHAIRMAN: You pick it up at the high school level. Under the Youth Connections program, is there a person who case manages X number of students who have been identified?

Mr Brahim: It is very much a case-management model. We fund the providers based on delivering certain outcomes. Those outcomes can be things like connecting with the individuals or getting certain activities done with the individual, either by re-engagement with the education system or something else that is productive.

The CHAIRMAN: Do those case managers come from the Smith Family? Does it ask to tender to provide five case managers in Rockingham for students who are failing at school?

Mr Brahim: In Western Australia we have 14 regions for our Youth Connections program and our School Business Community Partnership Brokers program. The services for each of those regions are put out to tender. In some cases we were not successful in the tender process and had to go through a gap-filling exercise. They are responsible for the regions, which will include case management. They would either have their own or have access to —

The CHAIRMAN: Can we have a copy of the tender you put out so we can look at it?

Mr Brahim: Sure. That is on the public record, so that is fine.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Can I pursue the issue about putting out the tenders and some of them not being able to be filled? How many of the 14 regions are country regions?

Mr Brahim: I will just read them out for the record. I am happy to provide this information out of session as well. There is a region that includes Albany and Bunbury; a region that includes Canning, which obviously is the metro area; the Esperance region; the Goldfields region, which includes the Ngaanyatjarra lands; the Fremantle and Peel region; Kimberley; Mid West; Midlands; Narrogin; Pilbara; Swan, Warren-Blackwood; and West Coast. Each of those regions will have a provider and some regions may have one provider that may do multiple regions.

Ms L.L. BAKER: With the contracts that you found hard to place, were they the regional and remote ones?

Mr Brahim: Yes.

Ms L.L. BAKER: Do you still have that problem? Do you have any current vacancies in the service delivery?

Mr Brahim: We have only just filled the last vacancy.

Ms L.L. BAKER: How long does the contract have to run?

Mr Brahim: We are just over 18 months into the contract. There was one area which was problematic and which is always problematic, no matter what service we try to provide, and that is the Kalgoorlie region, which includes the Ngaanyatjarra lands. That occurs for a range of reasons, such as accommodation, and it affects all service providers.

Ms L.L. BAKER: How long did you say it has taken to fill the contract—18 months?

Mr Brahim: It did not take that long to fill the contract but to get services out there.

Ms L.L. BAKER: One of the problems the sector always has is that from the point of awarding a contract, the term of the contract might be three years and it takes eight months at the front end to get the contract or they do not find staff or get staff or services out there to the communities and so they always have a problem in getting their numbers for service delivery. That issue has long been a challenge for the federal government when dealing with regional and remote communities, particularly in Western Australia. Do you have any strategies that you are looking at, other than bringing in eastern states' providers to deliver services, which I know has happened?

Mr Brahim: It is a significant issue across all tiers of government. I suspect it is less of an issue for the Australian government in terms of direct service delivery because we are not into direct service delivery, although we do a few things. Our contracted party struggles. That includes the state government—we have a number of partnership agreements which we fund the state government for and they are responsible for the delivery—as well as the Australian government and also local government. The third sector is probably in a lesser position because they do not have the financial backing to provide accommodation, which is always a big issue. To answer the question, this is a partnership between the Australian government and state government and the Ngaanyatjarra Council for the Ngaanyatjarra lands. We are working with them to look at an alternative model around employment services. As part of that discussion we are looking at the provision of services more broadly and how we enter into a new relationship with the council across a whole range of

services. While it started with employment services, we took into account the fact that the services have taken so long to get out to those areas. Without picking on youth services, I suspect that if you look at all services it will be exactly the same, because it is so diverse.

Ms L.L. BAKER: What changes will you make with the Ngaanyatjarra contracts to open it up, if that is not commercial-in-confidence?

Mr Brahim: I am happy to talk about the principles. The principles are on the public record. We have released a discussion paper on remote employment services because this is a national approach, and we have been negotiating with the Ngaanyatjarra Council in advance of that national approach.

The CHAIRMAN: Could we be given a copy of that discussion paper?

Mr Brahim: Sure. I assume that someone will tell me what I am committing to.

The CHAIRMAN: We would like that as supplementary information, and also the other document you have on the regions.

Mr Brahim: I am more than happy to provide the providers in those regions for both the youth services and the partnership broker providers.

Ms L.L. BAKER: The principles?

Mr Brahim: The key principle is that the service is likely to be more effective if it is delivered locally by local service providers. There are a whole series of sub-principles under that, but that is probably the main one you would be interested in. To do that we have to look at the capacity in the locations. If you look at remote areas in not only Western Australia, but also a number of other places around Australia, “remote” equates to also having a significant Indigenous population compared to the metropolitan area, proportionally. A significant number of Indigenous providers in the sectors either are in the game or could potentially be in the game. Part of that is how we build the internal capacity of the third sector and also identify the potential barriers like accommodation. I know that the Australian government is having discussions through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs with the Department of Housing about how to create viable accommodation for the third sector in some of these locations. The discussion paper will outline some of the additional principles, but I think a key for this group is where it can be done locally. In the past, on the education side, that has been trialled through the provision of training teachers locally. They already have housing and are residents and will not be in and out of there in two years. That is the type of model that we want to expand on.

Ms L.L. BAKER: So it is about providing access to Government Regional Officers’ Housing—we call it that over here—for the third sector for those projects that you are trying to get out there. Would that be one of the things you are looking at?

Mr Brahim: That is one of them. There are multiple options. The decisions have not landed yet. If they have, I am not aware of them and they would have landed just recently.

Ms L.L. BAKER: That is very interesting, thank you.

Mr Brahim: We are also looking at investment in these locations by some non-government organisations which may potentially have a housing stocking and which can create viable local business and other things relating to economic development.

Ms L.L. BAKER: So it is working with the Aboriginal enterprise development staff—I do not even know what that is called these days, but you know what I mean.

Mr Brahim: Yes. Part of the discussion paper looks at localised Aboriginal economic development as well. If you bring both of those together by creating a viable delivery mechanism, you are actually supporting local economic development rather than bringing it in.

The CHAIRMAN: Following on from Lisa's question, basically she asked you how successful it was in metro area versus regional areas. When are the regions reporting to you, and is that report made public? It would be very interesting for us to look at it. If they have to give you an annual review and that is in the public domain, it would be good for us to look at those reports.

Mr Brahim: I will take that on notice. If I am able to, I certainly will provide it. I understand that something was provided to the committee from the national office, but that could have been a national evaluation report—I am not quite sure—and the Western Australian aspects of it. If it is publicly available and able to be presented, I will provide it.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Thank you, Kevin. I just wondered about the Youth Connections program. Do we have a figure on how many young people are engaged in the program in the metro versus regional areas and where the referrals come from? I come from Esperance. What does the Youth Connection program look like in my town? Is there a shopfront or does the person work within the schools? How is the service engaged and who knows about it?

[10.30 am]

Mr Brahim: So, if they are doing their job as they are contracted to do, they will be engaging all relevant stakeholders. The schooling sector is critical to that. In some locations it will be community groups as well, and in some locations it will be industry to varying degrees. Ultimately, as well, in my view it also should be the parent groups, because ultimately they are essential to what they are looking at. One of the key issues would be how much of the cohort do they actually have that is in scope of being at risk, and how much do they not have. Although we try to pick up those who fall through the cracks, we have only the capacity to pick up so much; we have probably only got the data on so many as well.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: So the referrals come from the education department, do they? How are those children identified and brought to the notice of the program?

Mr Brahim: I do not know that level of detail with the program, but I will certainly let you know out of session.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: How much money is actually put to the program? Can you tell us what is assigned in the budget to the Youth Connections program in Western Australia in any one year?

Mr Brahim: I can let you know that; I do not have it off the top of my head, but I can let you know that.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you maybe tell us what links there are between that Youth Connections program and industry?

Mr Brahim: There is a stronger connection with our partnership brokers program, so there is the Youth Connections and the partnership broker. The partnership brokers have it as their sort of like task to actually engage industry and get industry–school partnerships going on.

The CHAIRMAN: Sorry, the partnership broker is not Youth Connections?

Mr Brahim: No, there are two programs.

The CHAIRMAN: Could you tell us a bit about the partnership broker then?

Mr Brahim: Yes. They have the capacity—also they have some flexibility in their funding—to actually facilitate, I suppose, big and little projects that are involved with schools, primarily, and engage industry in schools. I think you were provided some examples in the Northern Territory and New South Wales through our national office, but it is really trying to facilitate local solutions and local innovative ideas and giving the community the capacity to actually deliver on those.

The CHAIRMAN: I probably should say that I received a package yesterday that was this thick. I have not had an opportunity to read through it, so the information that you believe we are aware of—the others may also not have had an opportunity to read through all of that information—please take it that we do not know, and so give us more rather than less.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: Is this the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions? Is that actually what we are talking about?

Mr Brahim: That national partnership is a commonwealth–state partnership under commonwealth funds—the partnership program and the Youth Connections program. Each of the states will have their own programs as well. In WA, they may have things like EVE coordinators—I think they are called EVE coordinators—which is the VET sort of coordination program et cetera. Each state government has their own; I am not aware of all the state government programs that fit in that banner. But nationally, every state has access to Youth Connections and the partnerships, and then each state complements that with their own programs. So, activities could be little things like little employment expos, or career talks, or having large businesses actually sponsor a school. It could be linking up local third party agencies with schools and industry. Looking at Albany as an example, you have this Great Southern Employment Development Committee, and they are actually our broker as well. It is getting industry interested in, for example, linking up with young people, whether they are in or out of school, around careers, career advice and jobs. I indicated expos et cetera; it could be facilitating maybe some part-time work arrangements, casual work arrangements, holiday activities et cetera.

The CHAIRMAN: Could we also have a list of who you are using as brokers for this national partnership?

Mr Brahim: Sure; I have the list here, which I am happy to leave, but I can send it electronically as well for ease of storage. That gives you the regions and who our partnership brokers and Youth Connections brokers are.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Who is the one in Albany again?

Mr Brahim: Albany is the Great Southern Employment Development Committee; Geoff Bowley is the chair of that. The Youth Connections is Skill Hire, so both local guys. It is probably fair to say, though, that really if you look at Youth Connections, they are picking up the young people when they are disengaged; I think the problem has already occurred. You may be interested, which I cannot answer because I am not in the schooling system, in what is happening before that happens, and what the key drivers to that are.

The CHAIRMAN: Do members have some more questions in relation our term of reference 3? If not, I am going to move on to term of reference 2?

In relation to the early years learning framework and the early childhood development strategy and the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, could you tell us how the commonwealth interacts with the state, and the responsibilities of each in relation to this program?

Mr Brahim: Sure. The Australian government, by and large, supports participation. If you have a look at the policy settings, that is probably a good place to start. My organisation, when the current government came into power, took responsibility for early childhood—essentially child care. Essentially, it was part of a productivity agenda. Part of the policy settings is that we do not want to have a barrier to people participating in the workforce because they have young children and they need to care for those, so the childcare sector is important in terms of productivity agenda. The other key aspect to that would be that once you have a captive market, how do you make the most of that in terms of the learning environment and in terms of longer-term productivity? That is where the early learning framework and things like the curriculum, workforce—quality workforce in that sector—became critical, because it was not just about child care, it was about early learning. They are the parts that our organisation is actually driving. There are other organisations that are involved

in early learning, such as playgroups et cetera. That is another department, so it is a bit different. But our organisation is solely focused on that productivity agenda. We do not deliver the service; that is done through third parties, and state governments are involved in that. Primarily there are two elements to our service delivery: one is that we fund some providers through what we call our budget-based funding—I am happy to provide some information about what that is. That is for providers in terms of sustainability: they may be the only provider in the market, so how do you make sure there is a service there? That will require some supplementation. The Indigenous service provision, for example, is very important, so we provide some funding through that.

The other element is making sure that we have a compliance framework around the CCB—the childcare benefit rebate—which is a tax system element. For a provider to be eligible to offer services where parents can claim the rebate, they have to be registered with the state government, and also maintain a standard of quality. We are also responsible for that.

The CHAIRMAN: There are some moves now, in relation to that rebate, of linking attendance at school by the children, are there not?

Mr Brahim: I am not aware of that, but in a number of locations—including in WA with state government support—there is the welfare reform sort of approach, where we are trying to link attendance to a whole range of things including welfare payments et cetera. It is similar to what happened in the Northern Territory, and it is being trialled here in WA. I am not quite sure if that extends to the childcare rebate.

The CHAIRMAN: If we wanted to find out more about what is being trialled in WA in relation to linking payments to participation, would we ask you for further information, or who would we ask?

Mr Brahim: The Department of Education has taken overall responsibility for the early childhood. Part of it was in Education and part was in the Department for Communities; it is now moving to Education. The person who chairs the early childhood reference group—commonwealth—state—is Robyn Kinkade in the Department of Education. It would be useful to ask her if there are any links between the welfare reform trials and early childhood. In terms of the welfare reform trials, I am not quite sure who in the state government is driving that, but the state government has actually identified the sites. I believe Cannington is one, and the Kimberley has some sites as well.

The CHAIRMAN: Our fourth term of reference was looking at access and opportunities for adult learning in regional and remote WA. We understand that the focus of the national foundation skill strategy is literacy and numeracy, and that you are hoping to start rolling this out next year. Can you tell us a little more about that program, and how you are planning on rolling it out to different areas?

Mr Brahim: To the best of my knowledge, the exact rollout arrangements have not necessarily been determined. The Australian government announced a workforce development agency at the budget, and we are not quite sure of the extent to which that workforce development agency will be involved in the rollout of the language literacy programs, as an example, including other training programs for adults. That is still to be bedded down. But I can let you know that two of our key programs in terms of language and literacy for adults that the Australian government drives, as opposed to the state governments—the state governments have a whole range of these—is our language and literacy and numeracy program; our LLNP program. That is focused on providing literacy and numeracy skills development for unemployed people. They are referred through Centrelink. They go onto Centrelink, they are identified as at need, and then they are referred to our providers. We have providers throughout Australia, so it is a regional sort of provision. We are currently in negotiations to rollover some of those contracts. The budget announcement included an extension of our LLNP program, particularly in regional areas; the budget papers indicate that a big focus of the new money will be actually in regional areas, consistent with our big push in the budget around regional Australia.

The CHAIRMAN: As a committee we looked at phonics with early childhood. Are there any guidelines for the providers who are given these programs in the remote and regional areas as to the approach they should take?

Mr Brahim: They would have to tender to actually be the provider in our location, and the tender specifications would have outlined our requirements.

The CHAIRMAN: Could we ask for a copy of the tender specifications so that we can look and see?

Mr Brahim: Yes; sure.

The CHAIRMAN: Because “phonics” is still a buzzword that comes up, so it would be interesting to see whether that was part of your tender requirements.

Mr Brahim: We have budget announcements that are saying we need to do more of this in regional and remote areas, and we know that across the board in all service provisions it is very difficult to actually provide those services, so we have increased effort but we know our capacity is limited. Part of our work is to actually have a look at different models and different ways of doing business around LLNP in regional and remote areas. That is, sort of, forward-looking work that we have started. But to make sure that it is a continued provision now, we are obviously continuing with the current arrangements.

The CHAIRMAN: Is that funding per capita, or have special allowances been made for WA because we have such a large remote population?

Mr Brahim: By and large most of our programs are formula-driven. The formulas actually do take into account remoteness. The tender documents will specify that. But the Productivity Commission, some time ago, indicated remoteness, I think, as 1.7 per cent loading—sorry; not 1.7 per cent, but 0.7 per cent of a loading. So, 170, probably, would be the figure. So, 1.7 times, not 1.7 per cent; 1.7 times is what the Productivity Commission has indicated. So, programs operate within that sort of framework in terms of the remote additional costs of servicing remote areas. As I indicated, though, we are looking at how effective it is, because despite the loadings there are still issues with remote servicing; we have indicated things like accommodation and other issues such as getting quality staff. If you try to get good quality staff in the Pilbara for the third sector, you have very slim chances; they are snapped up almost straightaway by the resources sector. We are now coming to understand that it is just not about a loading of X; there are other factors that impact on that. That is part of our assessment on how we move forward about better service provision in regional and remote Australia across the board, irrespective of whether it is adult education or early childhood education.

[10.45 am]

The CHAIRMAN: Are we able to ask you to provide us with a list similar to the other list of who the successful tenderers have been, so that we can possibly then contact them on an individual basis and ask them what they are running and what has proven successful?

Mr Brahim: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: And again, in relation to that, like we asked for the previous area, how long have they been running? And if there are any annual reports in relation to each of these people who have been successful in getting the funding for this, if they are putting in an annual report and that is public knowledge, could you again provide the committee with a copy of those evaluations so that we can see what is working and where?

Mr Brahim: Yes, and if there are any issues I will liaise with Brian about how we work through those issues, but certainly if they are publicly available, that is not a problem at all. Commercial-in-confidence we will have to work through to see, but certainly if we remove any commercial-in-confidence information, I am sure it would not be an issue. There is another program I mentioned.

There are two. One is LNP. The other one is what we call WEL, the workplace English literacy program, and that is upskilling existing workers. So, for those existing workers who do not necessarily have the literacy requirements that are needed, we do fund providers, or it is providers in partnership with an employer, to actually upskill existing employees within the employment of that employer.

Mr P. ABETZ: Who runs that?

Mr Brahim: That is a different way we manage that. Essentially, my office gets a budget for the state and then we go and liaise with providers and employers, or the employers come to us and then we enter into a contract. We directly contract a provider in partnership with an employer to say, “You will provide a service or literacy development for X number of employees over X amount of time.” Again, I am happy to provide you with those details subject to there not being commercial-in-confidence issues.

Mr P. ABETZ: So, does the employer organise that to tap into the funding or are there third parties that come in and do that?

Mr Brahim: It has to be a registered training organisation. If the employer is that, then that is okay. But as a delegate I would have to argue that I would not be doing that for employees anyway, so I would probably hesitate to approve something like that. By and large a few of our TAFE providers we contract, primarily because they actually get a lot of employers that are coming to them asking the question, “Can you do something?” Then they come to us and say, “Look, we’ve got all these employers or this employer that’s got this issue”, and we try and do the deal. But by and large, obviously, it is easier for us to have longer negotiations with another government agency than necessarily to always interact with an employer, because they are very busy and we want to minimise the bureaucracy for them but to maximise the service that their employees get.

The CHAIRMAN: If a new company was setting up, say a new mining company, and they said they wanted to employ more Indigenous people and they came to you for advice, what type of advice would you give them?

Mr Brahim: Okay; this could be a thesis! So I will try and be as succinct as possible. We have a program called the Indigenous employment program—IEP, which you may have heard of—and that provides financial assistance exactly to do that. Financial assistance can be to the employer or it can be to a contracted party to actually provide the support for people to be employed. So some provide services for soft skills, hard skills etcetera, get them employable and then facilitate or broker their employment into a range of employers. When we go after the employer direct, by and large the employer is contracted to get people into their employment; whereas a service provider would try and build them up then for multiple employers. An employer can also be a service provider. So we can have an employer that says, “Look, we’ve got 30 vacancies, we only want to employ 30, but we want to train up 50 because there may be some attrition et cetera. But if 40 graduate, we’re happy to place the other 10 in our suppliers et cetera.” So that is how the model works. So the advice we would give them is: come and talk to us. By and large, if they want to employ more than five, it is worth them and us entering a relationship, because there is always for accountability purposes some paperwork involved. Any less than five, we refer them to our job services providers, our JSA providers, or other IEP providers. So if an employer comes and says, “We want an Aboriginal”, we will say, “Well, there is an IEP service provider in your region, have a chat with them and we’re happy to broker that relationship”, or we do direct deals with them.

We have also just announced at the budget, which may be of interest in the other terms of reference, where nationally we are rolling out a school-based traineeship program through the IEP. Other states were doing that to an extent and WA—the state government—was doing Aboriginal school-based traineeships. So we are in a transition arrangement where we are going to help support school-based traineeships in WA and then working on an arrangement with the state government on how we can make sure we do not trip over each other going forward.

The CHAIRMAN: Would your work in this area link with Patrick Walker?

Mr Brahim: He has moved to RAC. Cliff Weeks is the acting director of DIA at the moment.

The CHAIRMAN: Patrick Walker has left?

Mr Brahim: Yes. I think he left about three or four months ago.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Yes, quite a while ago.

The CHAIRMAN: So, Cliff is —

Mr Brahim: Yes. Patrick—say, three months ago—certainly did extensively, for example, start on the steering committee for the Ngaanyatjarra lands. Finally, one in the IEP, as also I understand you were interested in the national office about the movement from Aboriginal students leaving school and then getting lost when they go back to the communities et cetera. So we have a couple of models here in WA, and I know you have some from other states, where we support schools or third parties that are engaged with the schools—so there is a partnership—to actually support the students as they are about to leave. And then once they have left for a year or two, to maintain a brokered relationship with them back in the communities to make sure that they are supported, they understand what services are available and/or facilitated into some sort of employment opportunity. So that is happening in a couple of little spots.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: So, Kevin, you are happy to fund state institutions that are providing programs? I think you provided some funding for the Pilbara TAFE. Is that in the adult education component in and around numeracy and literacy or is that other programs?

Mr Brahim: The state agencies. In fact, if you look at WEL, quite a bit of our WEL activities are with TAFEs. I do not have the detail of every single LNP provider but I suspect a few of our own providers would be TAFE providers. And in fact for the Mid West—is it Batavia institute?—we had an IEP program that we had with OMSA, offshore marine something, an organisation that linked up with Gorgon that tried to do some stuff for Aboriginal people that want to get careers and that. So we actually try and sow the seeds and then ultimately our relationship with Batavia—and I believe they are in agreement—is that we seed it, we fund it to start with and iron it out and then they try and embed that in their profile money. So then they just do it themselves because that is their core business. So it is almost like allowing them to change that direction, because it takes a couple of years to change direction, where there is a good need and industry engagement.

There is also national funding, so I do not have all that information but if you want some more information about that, by all means I am happy to try to facilitate that. So we have got the announcement some time ago about this critical skills investment fund as an example where training providers and industry get together and develop their own workforce plan and actually deliver on it rather than going through a bureaucratic process and all of that. So there is quite a bit of money made available for that as an example. So I am happy—or the contacts that you had when you went to Canberra may be happy—if you are interested to try and find out more information about access to national programs at a local level around the training agenda.

The CHAIRMAN: We want to particularly know about the third reference, the tri-borders program.

Mr Brahim: That is more for the state government. I do not know information about that. Locally we are not involved in the delivery of any of those programs, so the state Department of Education, I would imagine, would be the key. But there will be different agencies, depending on focus areas, so I presume there would be arrangements with—I think I saw it in the paper yesterday or the day before—the policing, for example, the arrangements that you have between states around policing. There are certainly education arrangements. The education department had some time ago and I presume there is still some mechanism—although it may not be the same as what I can recall—where you track kids who go across borders and how you track and then move their educational

profile with them so that they can get picked up pretty easily in terms of their learning, engagement et cetera. So the tripartite arrangements would be varied but primarily around service delivery by the state government and in some locations local government. So if you have a look at the Ngaanyatjarra council, their office is in Alice Springs, so there is in a sense a tripartite there.

Mr P. ABETZ: In terms of the Ngaanyatjarra lands where employment opportunities are so, so limited, to get people motivated to do training, if they want to leave the lands there are no jobs.

Mr Brahim: Yes.

Mr P. ABETZ: What is your comment on that?

Mr Brahim: My personal comment?

Mr P. ABETZ: Yes.

Mr Brahim: I suppose it is a bit of an official comment as well because it has been discussed in the forum that we are in. There is a whole range of jobs that are filled by non-Aboriginal people, and some of them may be long term to get to. So it may be difficult to get to the school principal's job in Warburton if you do not start. I went out to Warburton about 10 years' ago having the same discussion. If we had started 10 years' ago, we may have a principal there now. Who knows? Then if you have a look at the policing and the health services, which the Ngaanyatjarra council or the Ngaanyatjarraku shire has the contract, on my understanding, to provide those. So, if you have a look at the service provision in the region, that creates umpteen jobs already. Whether people are fit yet to move into those is another question. The other thing is if you look at the hierarchy of some job opportunities, that may be at the peak. You know, how do you get a sergeant to be an Aboriginal person, because then your issues of accommodation start to get minimised a bit? One below that is there is a whole range of services that currently are not being delivered in the lands, which as citizens of Australia they should be entitled to. If they then start to be delivered in whatever form or shape it takes in the future around innovative delivery mechanisms, that creates other employment opportunities. Another thing is—and I think this is one which is being explored as well in our remote employment services discussions paper—that is actually being done on the lands by the community and that is currently unfunded and really should be because in other areas we are actually funding those types of activities. And the whole shift from CDP wages comes into play. CDP is still around but the wages are moved. So, I do know that at Karrakatta Cemetery—that is the cemetery that maintains jobs—if that is done in terms of the gravesites out in the lands, who pays for that, even though it is being done by the community members? So maybe there are part-time jobs that are available, and if you can get part-time jobs or casual jobs with some other development opportunities through our services, I think you look at the economic development aspect of it and community development, which includes individual development, and then you get viable labour markets.

Mr P. ABETZ: In fact room for an apprenticeship model for training up the locals so that they can take on those jobs?

Mr Brahim: Absolutely, and create new ones.

The CHAIRMAN: Before I close the session today, is there anything that you would like to sum up that maybe we have missed, that you think in relation to this area you might like to give us some guidance as to further research that we might like to undertake?

Mr Brahim: There has been a lot of study into some of these things already, so they are the messages they may be telling the committee. Something you may be interested in and obviously from a WA base is what the idiosyncrasies are of the state. You hear always Queensland and WA are boom states et cetera, and then you have the patchwork economy where you hear—certainly publicly there have been some speeches by politicians—in the same week that the smelter in fact in Newcastle closed and BHP announced a record profit. So, that must play out in WA. We have seen that, for example. We have got a local employment coordinator in Kwinana because the

unemployment rate in Kwinana for pockets of people is so high, and yet we have a relatively low unemployment rate for the state. So, the extent to which the issues you are looking at in the terms of reference are localised and may be potentially masked by the prosperity that we are in relative to other states, relative to other countries really as well in Australia. In many cases I think some of the challenges are actually hidden where we have people sleeping in cars and high youth unemployment rates for Indigenous people in the likes of Port Hedland or Roebourne or Karratha when they are flying in people around Australia. That gives the example of it, but it is more than just the Pilbara; even in the metropolitan area, and I think you focus on youth connections and how you have got disengaged people.

How do we actually make sure that we realise our prosperity to make sure people are not left behind? The data might tell you some of that from the education department and other sources. The data may actually identify where those localised pockets are and if there are solutions that can be trialled and progressed in these innovative pockets, it could tell us some good ways to address it in other locations.

The CHAIRMAN: We would like to thank you for your evidence before the committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for the correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 28 days from the date of the letter attached to it. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. Once again, thank you very much for coming along this morning.

Hearing concluded at 11.00 am
