



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMICS, INDUSTRY AND
RECREATION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2023-24](#))

Members:

MR T WERNER-GIBBINGS (Chair)
MS F CARRICK (Deputy Chair)
MS D MORRIS
MS E LEE
MR S RATTENBURY
MR T EMERSON

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 11 FEBRUARY 2025

This is a **PROOF TRANSCRIPT** that is subject to suggested corrections by members and witnesses. The **FINAL TRANSCRIPT** will replace this transcript within 20 working days from the hearing date, subject to the receipt of corrections from members and witnesses.

Secretary to the committee:
Ms S Milne (Ph: 620 50435)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

APPEARANCES

ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority.....	1
Canberra Institute of Technology	1
Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate	1, 20
Infrastructure Canberra	1
Office of the Work Health and Safety Commissioner	1

Privilege statement

The Assembly has authorised the recording, broadcasting and re-broadcasting of these proceedings.

All witnesses making submissions or giving evidence to committees of the Legislative Assembly for the ACT are protected by parliamentary privilege.

“Parliamentary privilege” means the special rights and immunities which belong to the Assembly, its committees and its members. These rights and immunities enable committees to operate effectively, and enable those involved in committee processes to do so without obstruction, or fear of prosecution.

Witnesses must tell the truth: giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter, and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, it may take evidence in-camera if requested. Confidential evidence will be recorded and kept securely. It is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly; but any decision to publish or present in-camera evidence will not be taken without consulting with the person who gave the evidence.

Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 2.36 pm.

Appearances:

Pettersson, Mr Michael, Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate
Arthy, Ms. Kareena, Deputy Director General, Economic Development
Starick, Ms. Kate, Executive Group Manager, Policy and Strategy, Economic Development

Canberra Institute of Technology
Lundy, Ms. Kate, Chair, CIT Board
Robertson, Ms. Christine, Acting Chief Executive
Andersen, Ms. Josephine, Executive Director, Education Futures and Students

Office of the Work Health and Safety Commissioner
Agius, Ms Jacqueline, Work Health and Safety Commissioner

ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority
Whitfield, Ms. Jo, Chief Executive Officer

Infrastructure Canberra
Geraghty, Ms Gillian, Director-General

THE CHAIR: We will now open this part of the inquiry into annual and financial reports for 2023-24, and we welcome the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations, Mr Michael Pettersson MLA, and officials from the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate and Infrastructure Canberra.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly. When you first speak, please confirm that you understand the implications of the statement and that you agree to comply with it.

As we are not inviting opening statements, we will now proceed to questions. Ms Carrick, would you like to go first?

MS CARRICK: Thank you. My question is about the Woden CIT. Will all of the courses from the Reid campus fit onto the site?

Mr Pettersson: I will ask the CIT witnesses to come to the table.

Ms Robertson: I have read and understand the privilege statement. Thank you for the question with regard to the Woden campus. Yes, all of the courses from Reid campus will translate over to Woden for delivery of training, commencing in July 2025.

MS CARRICK: Excellent. That is not far off.

Ms Robertson: No, not at all.

MS CARRICK: That is great. Is the building big enough for growth in CIT courses or indeed to host any other types of courses there?

Ms Robertson: The building has been designed to accommodate 6,500 students, and the staff that will be supporting those students. In terms of growth, there is some space within the building that will allow us to grow in ways that are not specifically around growing training numbers. The use of digital technologies—and state-of-the-art digital technologies are part of that building—will allow us to be able to run classes in a variety of different modes. For example, some students may choose to come on campus and study; other students may choose to join in virtually and study from home or study from other locations. The affordance of the building allows us to reach more students, but that does not necessarily mean that, physically, more students will be coming on campus.

MS CARRICK: Have you had any pushback from students about the lack of student parking there?

Ms Robertson: Pushback: at this stage, no. We are communicating with students around the changes. We are certainly promoting active travel. The significant affordances of the building are the options for students to be able to use showering facilities and bike storage facilities. We are actively encouraging students and staff to think about alternative forms of transport, to be able to ensure that they can make the most of what is on offer at CIT Woden.

MS CARRICK: With the activation of the precinct, there will be CIT businesses—a bakery, café and that sort of thing. Will they be open all year round or will they just be open during the CIT terms?

Ms Robertson: The purposes of those facilities are to allow our students to gain hands-on experience in their courses. The timing of the activities that go on in those spaces are aligned to a student's program of study. They will not be open all the time. They will be open when students need to get that experience, and students need to engage more broadly with the community around on-the-job training, active engagement in hospitality, and in hair and beauty, for example.

MS CARRICK: I will have further questions about how the precinct evolves when it is not a destination all the time, and how it has the conversations about enabling an active precinct.

MR HANSON: Chair, may I have a supp?

THE CHAIR: I have a question for CIT as well. But if this is supplementary to this issue then I am happy—

MR HANSON: It relates completely to Woden.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

MR HANSON: Are the courses that will be at Woden an expansion of existing courses that are already being conducted in the city and elsewhere or are you actually going to have some new courses at Woden?

Ms Robertson: There will be a transition of courses that are currently delivered at Reid to CIT Woden. In saying that, our profile is not static. We continue to respond to industry needs, and adapt and change our courses, depending on skills in demand.

MR HANSON: With respect to what happens at Reid, there will be an expansion at Woden, but you are not specifically going to open new courses at Woden because it is a new site?

Ms Robertson: No. That is correct.

MR COCKS: In terms of the Woden campus, one of the concerns whilst it is being built is around crime—criminal behaviour. I understand that the government was going to get some cameras installed in that precinct to help with security. I went past there the other day. I could not see any sign that there were security cameras there. Can I ask: whereabouts have they been located?

Ms Geraghty: I confirm that I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Security cameras have been installed in and around the construction site. We have not publicly let people know where they are located, but I am happy to take the question on notice to make sure we can give you the zones, as to where they are.

MR COCKS: It would seem to me that not telling people that there are security cameras there or making sure that those security cameras are visible negates the deterrent effect of security cameras.

Ms Geraghty: I am happy to—

MR COCKS: Is that what you are saying? You have deliberately chosen not to publicise—

Ms Geraghty: No, we have not given the exact locations, but I am happy to take the question on notice and give you some more details.

MR COCKS: Thank you.

Mr Pettersson: Mr Cocks, I believe I sent you some correspondence outlining some cameras. Is that correct?

MR COCKS: Yes, we have been in touch about cameras.

Mr Pettersson: With the location being identified, you are saying that you have been to that site and you could not—

MR COCKS: I have been to the site and there is nothing that I can see down there. I

am concerned that none of the local businesses can see any change in behaviour as a result, either.

Mr Pettersson: We will take it on notice.

Ms Geraghty: Yes, we will take it on notice.

Mr Pettersson: We will chase that up.

MR HANSON: Minister, I asked you some questions the other day in the Assembly, relating to data from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research. I want to follow up on that. It is the data relating to commencements, cancellations and withdrawals, completions and people in training. In terms of commencements, if you compare the June 2024 quarter to the 2020 quarter, we are down 7.5 per cent; but in other jurisdictions it is going up. You touched on that the other day in the Assembly. Firstly, why? Is it purely about economic factors, and what are you doing about it?

Mr Pettersson: Partly economic factors but also some government decisions. Ms Arthy can provide more information.

Ms Arthy: I have read and understood the privilege statement. Thank you for the question, Mr Hanson. There has been a decline, as you say, between 2022 and 2024. We peaked at about 7,660 in 2022, at the height of COVID. I mention that time because one of the reasons for the fall has been the withdrawal of Australian government incentive payments. We see a direct correlation between commencements and incentives that the commonwealth government apply. During COVID, there were a lot of incentives provided to boost apprenticeships. There were two main schemes, and they were withdrawn from 30 June 2022. That explains the considerable drop. That also drives what happens nationally as well, for every state and—

MR HANSON: The comparative data that I have shows a decrease in the ACT, but other territories and states improved.

Ms Arthy: Yes.

MR HANSON: Surely, with those national subsidies and initiatives, if it happens in the ACT, why would that be different from New South Wales?

Ms Arthy: There are different policy settings. There are some other reasons as to why this happened in the ACT. Each state and territory has a different set of policy decisions, driven by their imperatives about what they are funding and what they are not. It is actually quite hard to do direct comparisons as to why our figures fall, and others may not. If we go back historically, our growth outdid every other state and territory, and we were coming off a fairly high base. If we come back to the falls in the previous years, the other significant issue was a decision taken back in 2022 for the government not to fund traineeships for government-funded employees. Until then, government employees—

MR HANSON: Which government? Is this federal or—

Ms Arthy: This is local. This is a decision that the ACT government made. That was in order to address budget impacts, because this is a demand-driven system. Basically, if you have an apprenticeship or a traineeship, you will attract subsidies. Part of the decision to bring the budget back, because it was growing considerably, was to remove incentives for traineeships that were for commonwealth, state or territory-funded public servants.

When you look at the decline that has happened, we can see that, over that period, the majority of the decline can be attributed to the reduction in government and business-related qualifications, which directly correlates with the decision by government to remove incentives for those employees. We have also seen a decline in retail traineeships, which we attribute to the general economic conditions, and where retail is going. There is also a slight decline in electrical apprenticeships, which we knew about, and there was a subsidy increase last year which is yet to flow through.

What we can tell you is that, for apprenticeships and traineeships in core sectors like carpentry, plumbing, civil construction, automotive, early childhood and aged care, those traineeships have remained steady. They have not declined over that time. We are seeing that it is a result of the decision to remove government employees, combined with the withdrawal of the Australian government—

MR HANSON: I have spoken to a number of trade associations. I do not have their specific data; maybe you could break that down for me. Do you have the data that shows where the commencements have reduced by trade?

Ms Arthy: Not by trade, but by industry, by occupation, yes. We can provide that to you on notice.

MR HANSON: By plumbers, carpenters; yes, that would be useful.

Ms Arthy: Yes.

MR HANSON: The government employees would be different from those in the building sector, because you can extrapolate through where that will be. If you could break that down by employment category or trade, that would be good.

Ms Arthy: Yes, we can do that by occupation, and we can provide that to you on notice.

MR RATTENBURY: In the same vein, I am interested in skill shortage issues. Across pages 62 and 63 of the annual report, there is a series of indicators where, for example, the ACT government targeted 5,000 skilled migration places annually and we got 1,200 from the federal government. The take-up of VET places was lower than expected across all groups. Interestingly, two of our six tertiary institutions could not say they were satisfied with the government's engagement. All of these things are giving me concern about skills in the future. Which sectors do you think are most at risk of skill shortages in the territory?

Ms Arthy: Thank you for the question, Mr Rattenbury. The skills shortage issue is so complex because it is not just related to the supply of education and training; it is related to how attractive an industry may be for people to come into. It may relate to enterprise

agreements. It is quite difficult. If we look at the ACT economy, we know that there are shortages in the construction-related areas, and we know that we need to make sure that there is a pipeline, particularly for the electrification of the city. That is why we are working very hard with people like Infrastructure Canberra and others, to try and make sure we have that pipeline.

We know that, with an ageing population, we need to look at aged care. There is also early childhood; and they are common, looking across. We also know that, with digitisation of the economy, we need to do things differently when we look at digital skills.

You could pick nearly any occupation and find some level of shortage. In Canberra, we have a very tight labour market. It is very hard to attract people here en masse. We are a growing economy. It is about how we target the government efforts we have to where we can make the biggest difference. At the moment we are focusing around the areas of construction, early childhood, aged care and ICT.

MR HANSON: You said things like, “How do we target,” and “We are focusing.” Can you give some specifics regarding what the initiatives are? You talked before about one that the government withdrew. You seem to be aware of the problem, but what are the specific initiatives that you have to attract more people to commence and stay within training in those skills?

Ms Arthy: I will give a couple of examples. There are on the website some industry action plans that we developed with industry, which go through five different industry sectors, and where we did some fairly intense work—all the different activities that we can undertake.

For example, if we look at construction, working with the commonwealth and the CIT, we are about to implement free construction places, as part of the free TAFE initiative. As well as the incentives that go out, we have increased incentives for electrical qualifications, because we knew that there were providers that required the additional support to bring them up to speed with what is happening in New South Wales, and to encourage more training places to be provided.

We have trialled some workforce attraction activities in south-west Sydney, because we know that is a natural place to attract people to come to Canberra. We are working as well, underneath the National Skills Agreement, on a whole range of activities to improve completions, which we are still working through, as well as improving the ability of the workforce for VET to be able to supply the training. There are so many different aspects.

MR HANSON: Are you able, on notice, to provide a summary of those initiatives to the committee?

Ms Arthy: They are all online. They are on the Skills Canberra website. We can provide the links in to that, but they are publicly available.

MR HANSON: That would be good.

Mr Pettersson: Is the question about what the initiatives are or how we determine what the initiatives should be?

MR HANSON: No, what they actually are.

Mr Pettersson: Okay.

MR HANSON: It sounds like you realise there are problems and shortages, and you have to address them. I am curious about how you are addressing them, and whether you have any metrics around that as well. I imagine that the website will show what they are, but how successful are they being? How long have they been running? Are they actually doing what we need them to do in addressing the shortfall or not? Coming out of this committee, what more needs to be done? That will be the conclusion that gets drawn.

MR COCKS: I have a question on the same topic. You made a very good point that it seems that the ACT have more than just a skills shortage; there is a workforce shortage. What modelling or analysis has the government done in relation to the workforce issues and the workforce shortages that go beyond skills?

Ms Arthy: I am trying to think of the best way to direct you on this one. In terms of modelling, there is another part of government, in Treasury, that looks at the broader economic modelling. We might have to take something on notice to see what they can provide.

In terms of what we do, in Skills Canberra, we do a lot of surveys of employers in the city to look at what skills we need. We also manage the skilled migration program. As part of that, we also look at what the broader workforce needs are within the ACT. We certainly have critical skills needs lists, as part of migration. We have skills needs lists for migration, and skills needs lists for skills. I am aware that Treasury does modelling that is economy wide.

MR COCKS: In that context, I am very interested in understanding whether you are looking at the barriers to workforce attraction. In particular, in your response earlier, you said that it is really hard to get people here. What are the barriers? Is cost of living a barrier to getting people here?

Ms Arthy: A couple of years ago, we commissioned the University of Canberra to do major research into exactly that topic. I think it is publicly available; it should be on our website. In short, it is a significant piece of work that also surveyed employers. Things like cost of living definitely come into it, but people say that of many capital cities. There are things like people not knowing about Canberra, sometimes. Once we tell people about Canberra and they see how good it is, they want to come. I am trying to think back to that research; it was a couple of years ago.

MR COCKS: In the interests of time, is that something you could provide a link to?

Ms Arthy: That is right. We can provide you with a link to that research. That was done, and since then we have run a lot of campaigns off it. With the campaign that I mentioned earlier, where we were going into Sydney to try and attract people, a lot of that was

about trying to get those people who are highly mobile—and that is part of the problem with Canberra; we are a highly mobile workforce—interested in coming to Canberra. The sooner we can hook them, and they can see how great it is, they tend to come and stay; and that is what we need.

MR RATTENBURY: Going back briefly to those indicators that I mentioned before, amongst them, one that surprised me was two of the six universities saying they could not be deemed to be satisfied with the government’s engagement. What did you make of that, and what is the response?

Ms Arthy: Mr Rattenbury, that was something that we have really taken into account. That indicator is based on a survey of the universities. We basically asked them: how well did we—and I am talking about us as bureaucrats—work with you and deliver on some things? This was during the time when there was talk around international student caps and it was quite a difficult period. We have taken it on board as good information. Of course, we were disappointed. We are looking at how we can improve what we do to make sure that we engage better with the universities.

MR RATTENBURY: What feedback are you getting from the universities about the impact of those international student caps? It is obviously such a critical industry for the ACT.

Ms Arthy: Mr Rattenbury, that is actually for the Minister for Economic Development. It is not part of the skills portfolio.

MR RATTENBURY: I will hold it for another day.

MR HANSON: With the dataset that we talked about before, I was specifically talking about commencements. Can you, on notice, perhaps, give me the same data by employment category for cancellations and withdrawals—which I notice are up 17.7 per cent—and completions, people completing the training, which are down 13 per cent? For example, New South Wales is showing a 64 per cent improvement. And the figure for “in training” is down 26.7 per cent. It seems like an enormous number.

Could you give me the dataset for those as well—cancellations and withdrawals, completions and in-training? Do you have anything further to add? Is there something about people in training? Why are people leaving their training—not just starting, but leaving once they have already started?

Ms Arthy: I will provide a short bit of context here. The reduction in the in-training would be commensurate with the reduction in commencements. If you have fewer people commencing then you will have fewer people in training.

We also know that there are different ways in which, for example, cancellations are recorded in different parts of the country. Ours are actually overestimated, so we have been doing some work with the NCVET to make sure that we can bring that in. So they are different. Also, when we are looking at non-completion—and I am saying this in the context that we are doing some work, as part of the National Skills Agreement, on improving completions—there are a lot of different reasons why people do not complete their apprenticeship. They might have got what they wanted, and they did not want to

complete. They might have changed jobs. There are a whole heap of reasons.

MR HANSON: Do you do an exit interview with apprentices where you can, and find that out? Otherwise, it is speculative, isn't it?

Ms Arthy: It could be with each provider. I am checking whether my CIT colleagues do that. I do not think we do. NCVER does some survey work. I will check with my colleagues.

MR HANSON: If you are losing people, and they are moving away, finding out why would be fundamental for them—

Ms Arthy: Yes, but there are different ways of doing this. I will hand over to my colleague Ms Starick shortly. South Australia led some national research that did a lot of work around why apprentices leave. We have not seen any reason to expect that the ACT would be different. We are using that research to look at a lot of the work that we are doing around how we can improve completions right now.

In terms of your specific question about exit interviews, I do not want to mislead you and say that we do not do them if we do. I just do not have that level of detail. Ms Starick, can you add anything?

Ms Starick: I have read and understand the privilege statement. We have a program, which is the Skills Canberra Field Officer Program, which works with school-based apprentices and new apprentices. That is around supporting them in the job that they are in, and in their apprenticeship—working with employers, and working with the apprentice to work through any issues they might be facing with their apprenticeship. From that, we do get some information, but I would have to check whether there are any other exit surveys that are carried out.

MR COCKS: Going to workforce attraction again, during last year's election campaign, the government clearly made some pretty significant promises around particular areas of workforce. I want to get some clarity around that. There was certainly a commitment around growing our health workforce by an additional 800 workers. What involvement have you had in understanding the breakdown of these workers, and have you undertaken any analysis to work out whether there is sufficient workforce in the ACT now to achieve those targets?

Ms Arthy: Mr Cocks, that level of detail is done from the health department because it is mainly about the ACT government health workforce. Those questions would probably be better directed there. Our involvement, as part of the workforce work that we have been doing, is that we have been working with the Health Directorate around how they advertise for people to come to Canberra. The research we have done suggests that how you advertise Canberra—what we are, what we offer—is significant when it comes to attracting people. In terms of the attraction side, we have worked with them, but the analysis of that in-depth work is done by Health.

We also have a skilled migration program, and we have also funded a trial with the University of Canberra and the Catholic University around nursing and midwives, to try and keep people in training there. But the analysis would be done by Health.

MR COCKS: It sounds like you do not have any involvement in understanding whether there are even enough workers in the ACT to achieve that increase.

Ms Arthy: Again, Mr Cocks, because this is in relation to the ACT government workforce, predominantly, the planning and the detailed planning would be done by the relevant directorate.

MR COCKS: I imagine that you would not want to see a situation, for example, where workers were simply being moved out of the private sector into the government sector, because that would be a reduction in our overall health workforce. I am looking to understand what we, the ACT, are doing to make sure we have enough health workers to staff those additional 800 in the public sector without ripping the guts out of the private sector.

Ms Arthy: There are two elements here as well. There are skills and higher education. From the skills point of view, we do work on what the future demand is for healthcare workers that require vocational education and training. That will be part of our skills assessment. I am sure CIT will be able to talk about what they do in terms of knowing how to pitch the work there.

The other, more tertiary education comes from universities, and the ACT government does not have a role in influencing how the universities, for example, train the workforce that is needed from there. In terms of planning the workforce for the health sector, that is probably better directed to the Health Directorate because they take that broader look. We do not look at that level of detail because the Health Directorate does.

MR COCKS: This is part of the administrative arrangements—the responsibility for workforce attraction—which is why I am asking the question today. It sounds like you are saying that you are not engaged in any of the planning around how we get enough people here.

Ms Arthy: I would not expect to be in this case because it is at a fairly detailed, sector-based level, and another directorate has far more knowledge than we do. What we have done is to help the Health Directorate understand how potentially to recruit differently and pitch Canberra. As part of my portfolio responsibilities, I have Brand Canberra and tourism. There is a way of putting advertisements into other markets that actually attracts people to come to Canberra, rather than a standard public service approach. We work with them on that level, and that is how we assist them.

MR COCKS: Maybe I can ask it in a different way: what analysis have you undertaken into the health workforce in the ACT and any workforce shortages in that sector?

Ms Arthy: I will come back to that in terms of Skills Canberra. We have not done that level of detail that you are trying to get to. I can potentially take it on notice and seek advice from my colleagues in the Health Directorate and come back to you on that one. It is probably the best I can offer.

MR COCKS: Thank you. If, in doing so, you can let me know what proportion of those workers are expected to come from interstate, what proportion are expected to come

from overseas and what attraction measures have already been commenced, that would be wonderful.

Ms Arthy: I will see what I can do, Mr Cocks.

THE CHAIR: I have a couple of questions—two on vocational education and training, and one for the state training authority. Due to the age profile of some of our kids, two of my neighbours and I have been paying serious attention to the announcements about the free TAFE. How many places will be or are available in the ACT? What courses are these announcements covering?

Mr Pettersson: 4,300 Canberrans have already benefited from free TAFE. I was lucky, at the tail-end of last year, to join with Minister Giles in announcing 300-plus construction-based places. As you are probably aware, the federal government is trying to progress a free TAFE bill through the federal parliament. Hopefully, more Canberrans will benefit from free TAFE into the future. We will ask CIT to talk through the specifics of those enrolments.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned the future, so I will come back to that, Minister.

Ms Andersen: I have read and understood the privilege statement. Thank you for the question. The minister mentioned that we have had over 4,300 enrolments in fee-free TAFE to date. Of those over 4,000 enrolments, we have had over 1,000 completions to date as well, and we still have over 3,000 students who are progressing through their studies. We have had 160 withdrawals, but we are pretty happy with that.

THE CHAIR: And that is 4,300 since—

Ms Andersen: Since the beginning of 2023.

THE CHAIR: With the actual places that are available, are there any more? What courses is the program covering?

Ms Andersen: There is a large course list. Over 70 courses are available. In the initial year of fee-free TAFE, we had 2,350 enrolments. In 2024 to 2026, we have been allocated 1,200 enrolments each year.

THE CHAIR: Do you expect to fill those?

Ms Andersen: Absolutely. There is very strong demand for all of those programs.

THE CHAIR: Minister, you mentioned the future; my child who is particularly interested is in year 8. What is the future of free TAFE?

Mr Pettersson: It is a contentious political issue at the federal level. I do not believe it is a contentious issue here in the territory; but, at the federal level, there is not bipartisan support for free TAFE. The House of Representatives recently passed a free TAFE bill that would guarantee 100,000 free TAFE positions into the future. I am very hopeful that the federal parliament will pass that.

Free TAFE makes a tremendous difference to our ability to deliver on our skills needs here in the ACT. It is something that I think many young people aspire to take up in the future. It is a great start in life for many people. It is a great second chance for many people. It is an opportunity for people that otherwise might miss out on an education to get that. I am very hopeful that the federal parliament will do the right thing.

THE CHAIR: I have a question for the state training authority. It is about the updated figures on the number of women entering the construction industry in the ACT. I will ask the minister and see what happens.

Ms Arthy: That will probably be for me.

Ms Agius: I have read and understood the privilege statement. Although this is not particularly my area, I do have some information that may be beneficial.

THE CHAIR: Specifically, what is the overall number, if you have it?

Ms Agius: It cannot be stated, and the reason it cannot be stated is that we need to know whether we are asking questions around how many women are in trades, or questions about how many people are in the construction industry. Unfortunately, a lot of the women in the construction industry are in the offices, doing the admin role. It looks overall like about 14 per cent, but it is actually more like around two per cent, if we are looking at trades.

THE CHAIR: Can you extrapolate a direct result of the government's support of women in construction?

Ms Agius: That is not in the area, unfortunately.

Ms Arthy: I can add a little bit more. We can talk about apprentice and trainee numbers, not necessarily employment, which is where we were crossing over. In terms of the number of women participating in building and construction training, between 2016 and the end of 2024, the proportion of female apprentices in building and construction qualifications increased from two per cent back in 2016 to 7.7 per cent in 2024, so it has significantly increased.

In terms of support that we provide, we have a couple of grant programs. One is still going; another one is completed. We have one with Lendlease around women in construction, to help women and gender-diverse people in acquiring skills for PPE, tickets and licences. We have one with the University of Canberra's Training and Upskilling for Women in Construction Project, which is looking at trialling micro-credentialling for female construction workers. We do have very specific programs that we try and run.

MR HANSON: Do you have any grants or initiatives for men who might be seeking employment in professions where there is a low percentage of men? In construction, if it is two per cent for women, trying to encourage women to get into that trade, vice versa, in things like child care, perhaps, or teaching, particularly primary school, are there any initiatives specifically tailored for men to access those particular skills or trades?

Ms Arthy: Mr Hanson, I might have to take that one on notice and see whether my team can get back to me before the end of this session. I cannot, off the top of my head, recall specifics, but we can come back to you.

MR HANSON: Great; thanks.

MR RATTENBURY: In terms of women in construction, under the ACT Women's Plan, the Third Action Plan—and there are some references in the annual report—it says:

Icon has noted that all Subcontractors will be required to meet a minimum onsite female subcontractor representation based on the total subcontract value of works

...

A subcontract under \$1 million has a minimum requirement of one woman on site. How are those targets decided? This might be for Ms Agius. Particularly, in the development of that policy, did you identify any evidence suggesting risks to safety and wellbeing, essentially by having just one woman onsite as opposed to, perhaps, having a minimum of two?

Ms Whitfield: It is really a question for the Minister for Women and her—

MR RATTENBURY: She told us yesterday that we had to ask in this session.

Ms Whitfield: Did she?

MR RATTENBURY: Yes. Feel the handball!

Ms Whitfield: Ms Geraghty implements this as part of the work that she does. I cannot provide any information on how those targets came about, because I was not involved in writing those policies.

Ms Geraghty: I can talk about how we are implementing the policies, but, unfortunately, the Women's Action Plan and the policies were set before I started. We are delivering them. Strathnairn School has an all-female project team, and, with that contract, we are working very closely on how we make sure that it is being delivered with health and wellbeing at the forefront. With Lendlease, we have had great experiences at CIT Woden, where we have had 15 apprentices and 15 trainees coming through, all female. That has been a really successful program. We are delivering on different areas of the third version of the Women's Action Plan, but I cannot identify evidence, so I will take it on notice.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you. At a practical level, by having just one woman onsite, would they potentially be more vulnerable to harassment and the like? Is that something you have considered as you work through the implementation?

Ms Geraghty: Yes. We look at culture at a worksite in a holistic sense, and it is not just about whether the females are in the minority or if males are in the minority. Infrastructure Canberra is adopting the Culture in Construction standard which talks

about health and wellbeing and conduct on sites. That is being adopted over a 12-month period. That talks about how we make sure that no-one feels unsafe. And we are working closely with our partners at WorkSafe.

Mr Pettersson: And you are talking about a minimum, not a maximum.

MR RATTENBURY: Indeed.

Mr Pettersson: You have to think about the challenge of industry constraints. Going to the figures that Ms Agius provided before, when you talk about two per cent of the workforce, it can be challenging to even reach some of the targets. We have aspirational targets to increase the representation of women in the construction industry. It is not a science. It is a bit of an art to try to follow through on the targets.

MR COCKS: Going to the Fee-Free TAFE question earlier, is that funded through a national partnership? That funding is provided to the ACT. Is that reported as part of the ACT's expenditure when it comes to the annual reports process and other mechanisms? How do we report the expenditure around that?

Ms Arthy: Mr Cocks, I will have to think through how that comes into the annual report expenditure. In terms of reporting, you are correct that it is part of a national partnership agreement with the Commonwealth. We do extensive reporting to the Commonwealth as part of that. I would say that, technically, because the funding comes to us, it would form part of our budget that is reported in the annual report. However, in terms of accountability, it is our accountability to the Commonwealth.

MR COCKS: Is it disaggregated anywhere in the report?

Ms Arthy: No. It would not be in the annual report.

MR COCKS: Okay. Thank you.

MS CARRICK: I have a supplementary about TAFE and apprenticeships. I would think there are a lot of young people who would like to do an apprenticeship, but it is not easy to find an employer to match with and get an apprenticeship. Is any work done by the ACT government to locate those young people and try to match them with an apprenticeship? They are at home, in their bedrooms.

Ms Arthy: There are a few elements to this one too. Through the Education Directorate, there are Australian school based apprenticeships. There is a fair bit of information and work done there. There are also group training companies that are able to help if someone is interested in an apprenticeship. There is so much information online. But you are right: getting that interest in a person and then knowing how to flow through is actually pretty critical. I do not think it is something that anyone has got right. You can always do more on providing career information. You can always do more to connect.

ACT unemployment rates are so low. There is a lot of demand for employment. It is a difficult issue. At the moment, we do not have a way to say, "This is an employer," from a government point of view. It is being dealt with by, say, group training companies. We have a couple here in the ACT. But how you get a teenager who is

sitting in their bedroom, and the parents—because the parents probably have a bigger influence—to know what VET is available and where to go is an issue that every government tries to tackle.

MR HANSON: In terms of marketing to parents, do you do that through the ASbA system in schools?

Ms Arthy: The Education Directorate manages the ASbA. I do not know exactly what is done at that level. You could direct that to the Education Directorate or we could take it on notice and check with them.

MR HANSON: They will be appearing before another committee that I will be attending, so I am happy to follow up with them.

MS CARRICK: This follows on from matching young people with a job. Regarding the new CIT in Woden—and more broadly, I guess—what conversations would there be to collaborate with the Innovation Network, or conversations with young people at Canberra College, or conversations with the Phillip trades precinct, to see where they would take apprenticeships? Also, what work do tradespeople want or do young people want? And how could the courses evolve to cater for their needs?

Ms Robertson: There is a lot wrapped up in those questions. We certainly see CIT Woden as providing an opportunity for the CIT to engage broadly with the community, particularly within the precinct and beyond. A significant part of the CIT's activity is to tell stories about the success of our programs: what a VET pathway can do for students and, importantly, what a VET pathway can do for women in trades. Our new strategic plan has some amazing images of young women who have engaged in vocational education and training, particularly through trades. We have women taking up trades that are not traditionally taken up by women: electrical trades, spray painting, and a whole range of other trades.

Ideally, our work through CIT Woden is to attract more learners into vocational education and training, specifically from an apprenticeship perspective. A lot of our work in that area is in the traditional trades, which are based at our Fyshwick campus. Again, it is about telling stories of the success of young people or even more mature-age apprentices who come into our learning environments. Choosing pathways for those learning environments is really important. On our CIT website and through our social media, we work really hard to get the stories out and, importantly, talk about success. If you go to our CIT website—I am not sure whether you are a Facebook user—there are some amazing stories that we really want to promote broadly across the ACT to get that message out.

MR HANSON: Page 9 of the ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority's annual report identifies that a member of the CFMEU is currently a board member of the authority. Is that still the case, given that the CFMEU is under administration?

Ms Whitfield: I have read and understood the privilege statement. That is correct. When that matter was raised, it was brought to the board. It is minuted in our board minutes that there was no issue with him being able to continue on the board. The ACT

branch was unaffected in terms of his role and his ability to stay on our board.

MR HANSON: Is the national secretary on the board?

Ms Whitfield: No; it is the assistant secretary. The national secretary, Zach Smith, stepped off on 1 July last year and we now have Josh Bolitho.

MR HANSON: Is the ACT branch under administration?

Ms Whitfield: No. I would not want to lead you astray on that. We did clarify at the board meeting, after the issue was raised—that they were suspended from being able to operate fully—whether that impacted Josh directly or his capacity as a board member, and we were assured—

MR HANSON: I presume that he is there by virtue of his role in the CFMEU, which is suspended, rather than as a random individual? I presume it is a CFMEU position—right?

Ms Whitfield: It is a union or an employee-representative position. Our board is made up of an independent chair, two representatives who are employee representatives, and two who are employer representatives.

MR HANSON: But the CFMEU is suspended, and his role is ostensibly, I presume—if his predecessor was from the CFMEU and, no doubt, the previous representative as well—

MR RATTENBURY: Mr Hanson, what do you mean by “suspended”?

MR HANSON: That is what Ms Whitfield said—that the CFMEU was suspended. Is that—

Ms Whitfield: I do not want to mislead in terms of language. When all of the branches, nationally, of the CFMEU were under investigation, we asked whether there were any issues in terms of Josh being able to continue or being affected in his capacity on our board.

MR HANSON: Who did you ask?

Ms Whitfield: We asked Josh directly, the board member.

Mr Pettersson: Mr Hanson, that union is under administration. It still exists.

MR HANSON: Sure, but, if an organisation is under administration, is it appropriate to have a representative of the organisation sitting on the board? That is the question.

Mr Pettersson: I would make two points. If someone is appointed as an individual, they serve as an individual. If someone is representing an organisation and that organisation still exists, and, if a decision was made by that organisation to cease that representation, it would be entirely appropriate for them to do so, but it does not appear that they have done that.

MR RATTENBURY: I have a question about the CIT. I am mindful, of course, that the Integrity Commission is still continuing to work on Operation Luna and that there are legal matters. I am not asking questions in that space. However, Minister, I want to seek your assurance. Obviously, there were significant governance issues raised through those processes. Since you have become the minister, what assurances have you been given that those governance issues have been addressed?

Mr Pettersson: I am very confident in the work that I have seen from the board and executives in responding to the issues that have been raised. There is, of course, a great opportunity for renewal at the CIT at this time. There is a real opportunity to shape the CIT for the future, in terms of board appointments as well as the executive.

MR RATTENBURY: It does seem, from the events we have seen so far, that the board was perhaps unaware, or was not made aware, of the information that was problematic. What changes has the board put in place in order to ensure we do not see a repeat of those circumstances?

MS LUNDY: At the time—

THE CHAIR: Have you read the privilege statement?

MS LUNDY: I certainly have read the privilege statement. Thank you very much, Chair. At the time I became chair, post the crisis, the former chair was pretty much at the end of his term. Since then, we have been on the normal cycle of appointments to the CIT board, as members reach their term. As you are probably aware, that is a process led by the minister through the Assembly and through the committees of the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY: Yes. My question was more—and I believe you were on the board at the time many of these incidents—

MS LUNDY: Yes.

MR RATTENBURY: around this able to happen. What has the board done to make sure we do not see a repeat of those circumstances?

MS LUNDY: We received a direction from the minister at the time to strengthen our procurement processes and financial governance. We have been through an extensive process of doing exactly that. We reviewed all of the financial delegations and we uplifted governance in the CIT organisation, not only through strengthening the processes of the board and executive management but also through establishing additional committees of the board to look specifically at governance and, of course, finance and audit. We feel we have changed a lot within the organisation and are confident that a circumstance like that could never happen again. We have done that with pretty close oversight of respective ministers and continue to do so, and we continue to be very proud of what we have been able to achieve in uplifting the organisation with, frankly, a completely new executive that has been part of that journey.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you.

MR HANSON: Minister, has the CFMEU been provided with any funding or grants to deliver training on behalf of the ACT government?

Mr Pettersson: I will have to hand over to officials for that one.

Ms Arthy: Mr Hanson, I will have to take that one on notice, given the time, just to—

MR HANSON: Okay—on any amounts that they have provided and for what purpose.

Ms Arthy: To get funding through us, they would have to be a registered training authority, and I do not think they are, so I do not think they could get any funding from us. It might be through the Training Fund Authority. They might do it.

MR HANSON: Yes. I am aware that they have done training before in various areas and they have been provided grants. That is what I understand. I would like to see whether that is confirmed. Currently, given that they are under administration, is any money going from ACT taxpayers to the CFMEU via the ACT government?

Ms Arthy: I can only take that for Skills. I am not sure about anywhere else. We can confirm, but I do not think there is anything from us at the moment.

MR HANSON: Mr Young is twitching to say something.

Mr Young: Thank you. Relating to the industrial relations part of the portfolio, I can confirm there is no grant funding or other funding being provided directly to the CFMEU.

MR HANSON: If you check for Skills and other areas, that would be great.

MR COCKS: Back to workforce attraction, one of the other government commitments was around 350 more bus drivers over the term. I would like to know whether there has been any modelling around workforce needs in terms of bus drivers and what it will take to actually achieve 350 additional bus drivers.

Ms Arthy: Mr Cocks, that is a matter for Transport and City Services as the employer of those bus—

MR COCKS: So you have not been engaged or consulted on this?

Ms Arthy: No, and I would not have expected to be, because this is about workforce planning of the government directorate.

MR COCKS: Again, it goes to the question of whether we have the relevant workforces in the ACT, but I take the point that there has not been consultation.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, thank you all for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answer to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

Hearing suspended from 3.35 pm to 3.45 pm.

Appearances:

Pettersson, Mr Michael, Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Arthy, Ms. Kareena, Deputy Director General, Economic Development

Young, Mr Michael, Executive Group Manager, Work Safety Group, Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy

Starick, Ms. Kate, Executive Group Manager, Policy and Strategy, Economic Development

Fulton, Ms Caroline, Executive Branch Manager, artsACT

Stewart-Moore, Ms Karen, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Business and Innovation

THE CHAIR: We welcome the Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Mr Michael Pettersson MLA, and officials from the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate and from Infrastructure Canberra. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. When you first speak, please confirm that you understand the implications of the statement and that you agree to comply with it. As we are not inviting opening statements, we will now proceed to questions. I will ask Ms Carrick to lead.

MS CARRICK: Not surprisingly, my question is about the distribution of arts facilities across Canberra. There is a structural imbalance, with the bulk of them being in the inner north, and the whole Murrumbidgee Electorate does not have one artsACT facility. Why is community arts—and, mind you, community sports—considered as an economic thing and in the Chief Ministers department as opposed to being social community facilities?

Ms Arthy: I am, Deputy Director-General, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, and responsible for Economic Development. I have had this portfolio since I joined the ACT government in 2017, and arts was part of that. It has been there all the way along. In terms of decisions about which directorate various parts go, that is above my paygrade, but I can talk about how we work with this within Economic Development. Arts is more than the facilities. When we look at it, it is about public art and arts policy. We know that having a vibrant arts sector is really important for tourism. We also know that, when we put on events—which I am also responsible for—it is good to tap into the local artists to be able to provide jobs and opportunities for our local arts but also to make our events really good.

By having arts sitting alongside our tourism and our events spaces and also as part of our business portfolios—because, at the end of the day, these arts organisations and artists are small businesses, and we can also provide a lot of support and engagement around building them as businesses—is how we have brought arts as part of an

economic development portfolio. With the delivery of the arts asset, we work with our colleagues in Infrastructure Canberra to make sure that the asset itself is fit for purpose. In terms of its planning and where things are and how it contributes to an economic development outcome for the city, it is that interface with tourism events—where we promote our artists to be able to attract people as well—and how we make sure we bring business in.

MS CARRICK: I think that you have just made my point that tourism and business events are a higher priority than local community arts.

Ms Arthy: No; that—

MS CARRICK: Well, there is no balance. There should be a better balance between tourism and—

THE CHAIR: Is that a comment or a question?

MS CARRICK: Perhaps that is a comment, but I just feel that the focus on tourism leaves community art in various parts of Canberra out in the cold.

Mr Pettersson: I appreciate the sentiment of where the question is coming from. I would add to Kareena's answer by saying that the creative industries are also a large part of the portfolio that the arts are a part of, and that is a very large part of our economy. It is worth acknowledging that there is this economic contribution and value. I hesitate to go down this road, but it would be wonderful if we did have a directorate of art—full stop. That would be wonderful. I am a realist, though. With the capacity that we have within the ACT government, we sometimes have to make decisions about how directorates are comprised to deal with resourcing. But, rest assured, the decision-making is quite separate. The decision-making that goes on within artsACT involves working with artists and arts organisations to deliver that community art and some of the wider considerations are considered in other parts of the directorate.

MS CARRICK: The arts provides benefits to people's mental health, and there are places where people come together and meet like-minded people and do their thing. So it is the matter of distributing it to everyone. Perhaps you might want to take on notice to provide a breakdown of the current arts grant funding and where it all goes to. My observation, when I do my analysis, is that all the grants tend to go where the facilities are, because that is where the artists are and the workshops are being run. So, if you are not lucky enough to have a facility, you do not get any of that social or economic activity.

Mr Pettersson: I might bring Caroline into this conversation to talk about the distribution of arts across the city, and then I might come in at the end on the arts.

Ms Fulton: I have read and understood the privilege statement. Yes, we will take on notice the details of the breakdown that you are requesting. As much as possible, we look at geographic spread as well as artform in terms of funding for the arts. Of course, we are working within the applications that we get. Where we have identified need for arts activation in particular spaces, we have provided funding for that. As you would know, Ms Carrick, the Tuggeranong Arts Centre has delivered arts activation in the

Woden area for a number of years and Belconnen Arts Centre has undertaken activation in Gungahlin. We are constantly looking at that mix. Where we get the applications from varies from year to year as well.

Mr Pettersson: I would add that, in the last budget, we funded the arts assets needs analysis. We are developing up what that will look like, but we hope to be able to speak to and respond to some of what you are hearing in the community.

MS CARRICK: I would just make the point that Woden is the major hub in Canberra's south. All the buses hub into there—so it is accessible. Yes, while the Tuggeranong Arts Centre does provide some pop-up activities, the major concern is: where do you do it if you do not have anywhere? So it is a constant battle for the Tuggeranong Arts Centre as to where they will do their pop-up things. In the library? The CIT will help. It is a problem.

MR EMERSON: I have a supplementary on that on public art pieces. Who makes the decisions on where public art will be located and what goes where? I have done a little bit of work on the arts map. Is that up to date and a useful piece in terms of—

Ms Fulton: There might be a couple of pieces that are in mid-relocation. So it might need a little bit of updating, but largely that would be up to date. There are a number of government directorates as well as private developers that deliver public art across the city. The map on the artsACT website is primarily focused on what is in the ACT public art collection. They are assets that sit under the responsibility of artsACT. We will sometimes take on assets that might have been purchased or undertaken as part of private development if they fit within our guidelines around important pieces of art and there being a value in terms of having it as part of the broader collection, which then receives ongoing care and maintenance from artsACT. But there is a mix. The Transport and City Services Directorate also undertake a range of murals—surface public art—and might also do furniture and landscaping elements that have a kind of public art component. The City Renewal Authority is another agency.

MR EMERSON: So there is a range of decision-makers who make a decision about why there are, say, 85 pieces of public art in Kurrajong, 23 in Murrumbidgee, seven in Tuggeranong and six in Yerrabi?

Ms Fulton: Yes. Some of the recent developments that have been going on in the Molonglo area have been those pieces of work that have just newly come up. They have been done by the private developer in terms of that space. Recent commissions for artsACT have included the Women of Significance works and the Susan Ryan public artwork that was undertaken last year, and we are in the process of a second one, Stasia Dabrowski, which will be located in Garema Place, where she worked. We have a focus when we are looking at any new entrants to the ACT public art collection, which is also about the diversity and geographic location. As part of the light rail development, we will be moving Dream Lens to the Tuggeranong Lake foreshore. So we look at those sorts of things all the time—that geographic spread.

Mr Pettersson: I do not want to make any announcements, but we have made decisions in recent times responding to some of the feedback from the south side.

Mr Emerson interjecting—

Mr Pettersson: If you look at the maps on the artsACT website—and I say this as a resident of Gungahlin—where you look at ACT government-owned assets, that presents a particular visual. But, as Ms Fulton said, that is not the whole scope of arts activity in our city. There is a whole range of arts organisations and visual elements that you will not find on that map. The point I was seeking to make was that we have already made decisions in recent times to respond to some of the feedback from the south side, and I look forward to being able to provide more information about that soon.

MR EMERSON: Thanks, Minister.

MR MILLIGAN: The feedback I have recently received from some theatre production companies is that they are in discussions with the government around hiring ACT government arts facilities and the fees that they get charged by, say, the Education Directorate, if we are talking about theatres in ACT schools. It is suggested that these fees have gone up 600 per cent. Can you explain why there has been a 600 per cent increase in hire fees to use an ACT government arts facility?

Mr Pettersson: Sorry; could you just clarify that. What facilities—arts facilities or schools?

MR MILLIGAN: Arts facilities. We have one in the Gungahlin Arts Theatre, as you know, in the college there. That is one example where the fees for hiring that space has gone up 600 per cent. I am asking what the justification behind that is. Whether that comes under your portfolio, because it is the arts, and/or whether it comes under the education department, I am not sure which one is responsible for that.

Mr Pettersson: It is my understanding that the decisions on school facilities and their hiring practices are managed by the Education Directorate. I think it is probably at the school level itself. So I think that might be a question for a different part of government.

MR MILLIGAN: Okay. I might just reserve that for that department. My question is in relation to the small arts business strategy 2023-26. The annual report suggests that there are over 50 actions for this strategy. How many of these actions are on track, how many have been completed and how many are still to be worked on?

Ms Arthy: Mr Milligan, I am presume you are referring to the Small Business Strategy?

MR MILLIGAN: Yes.

Ms Arthy: The report that was tabled by the former Minister for Business probably represents the latest update. To summarise it, of the 52 actions, 21 are completed, 28 are in progress and three are yet to start. One that is yet to start is around exploring opportunities to allow businesses to access makerspaces. We have started work on that through our Canberra Innovation Network and the voucher system. The other one is exploring a digital account for business, and the third one is exploring a government to business secondment program.

MR MILLIGAN: What have been the outcomes of these actions that have been completed? Have you got any feedback? What are the measurables in terms of the success?

Ms Arthy: I may hand to my colleague Ms Stewart-Moore, who will have more detail about the specific outcomes on the different initiatives. But, as I hand over, one of the success stories that we have was around the business expo and the Small Business Expo, which was an initiative underneath the action plan where we had nearly a thousand participants through the door at a day out at Epic, where people were able to access information about government services and connect business to business. We got very good feedback from that particular initiative. But I will hand to Ms Stewart-Moore to take you through some other outcomes that we have had.

Ms Stewart-Moore: I have read and understand and acknowledge the privilege statement. Thank you for the question. There have been a number of actions delivered and are ongoing with the ACT Small Business Strategy. As Ms Arthy said, the Small Business Expo was just one of those. We have a couple of our services that are provided under that strategy. One is the Canberra Business Advice and Support Service. That service has been up and running since 2020 and exists to really help businesses in a range of different ways. They offer up to four hours of tailored advice and support to businesses. It has been really well received by those businesses who have used the service. Since the commencement of that service, more than 420 unique businesses have engaged with CBASS. That service is delivered by Lighthouse Innovations, a company with many decades of experience working with businesses. That is an ongoing service this year. We also have the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business Support Program, which has been stood up to support, through mentoring and coaching, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.

We have made significant progress in some of the communications for business. The ACT Business Hub website has been fully redone and is now a great one-stop shop for businesses to be able to access a range of ACT government information. It also brings together some of the relevant Australian government information, because, obviously, when businesses start up, they really are looking at things like business registration, the tax office, some of those things. So it is drawing together some of the resources from the federal government as well as the ACT government services. It is an ongoing work in progress in ensuring that that website is really fit for purpose. We are certainly looking at more information by industry so that it is really easy for businesses to almost take a step-by-step approach. The first one of those has been food businesses. That is one of the common start-up businesses that Access Canberra particularly hear from. So it is really tailoring some of that information to those businesses. We have also had great success with our CBR Business Update e-newsletter. That is about centralising some of the communication that goes out to businesses through an easy e-newsletter that is delivered fortnightly. That again brings together ACT government information and relevant federal government information to businesses. There are around 9,000 subscribers on that e-newsletter list now—a really great sort of open rate. That is well above industry standard—which is around 58 per cent I think.

So some of those things have been really well received. The Access Canberra Business Assist Team would be another one. It would probably be best for Access Canberra to talk to that. The Business Assist Team, is a sort of central portal into government, with

a team that is there dedicated to helping businesses find what they need within government, has also been really well received.

MR MILLIGAN: I am really keen to understand who was involved with the creation of this strategy. Was the business community and other authorities consulted on this? Is there an opportunity for businesses to provide feedback on this strategy? Obviously, I think it would have to be fairly fluid because the business environment changes all the time. Is there capability for this strategy changing according to the environment that we might see in the business community down the track? Is there that flexibility with it as well?

Ms Arthy: Mr Milligan, the simple answer is yes. This was developed with key industry groups—and Ms Stewart-Moore can talk to that in a bit more detail. I chair a stakeholder forum, which has the Business Chamber, Canberra Regional Tourism, the Property Counsel, MBA, accountants, Women in Business and a couple of others I cannot remember off the top of my head. They were with us all the way along on the developments, right from the concept all the way through to it being implemented. When we meet with this forum, the first item is always the Small Business Strategy and any feedback from the industry peaks on any issues facing small business and what the things are that we need to focus on. We are always asking about priorities. So, while it may not change written words that are on a document, it is a living and breathing thing for how we engage with businesses in relation to this. We would certainly welcome feedback from business about what the issues are and how we can adapt our services to do better.

MR MILLIGAN: Is it possible to maybe provide to the committee and to the chair, if possible, a list of all the stakeholders that were involved with the creation of this strategy—just so I can see which industries were consulted and where there may be gaps and where they are well covered?

Ms Stewart-Moore: Yes; absolutely. In fact, I think in the front cover, it talks to the industry groups that were involved in the strategy. But, just to add to what Ms Arthy said, at the time of developing the strategy, there had been a lot of consultation. It came off the back of COVID and a lot of consultation through the Better Regulation Taskforce and a lot of engagement that Access Canberra had been having with businesses throughout that period as well. It took into account all of that feedback that came through those processes—so that we were not going out to individual businesses again—and also a lot of the consultation that had been done in the lead-up to that as well. But I think the industry groups are listed on the inside of the cover.

Mr Pettersson: I have the list: the Australian Hotels Association, Canberra Business Chamber, CPA Australia ACT Branch, Canberra and Region Tourism Leaders Forum, Canberra Women in Business and Master Builders Association.

MR MILLIGAN: Okay; so a limited list of stakeholders.

Mr Pettersson: Do you think we have missed anyone?

MR MILLIGAN: Let me have a look and review it and I can then provide feedback in terms of grassroots contact, if you like. I will send you a text.

Mr Pettersson: If you have suggestions, we are going to have to do a new strategy when this one expires. So let us know.

MR RATTENBURY: I would like to ask about the recent Netflix production that was occurring in the ACT. The police and I do not want to ask about the flow over the falls, but I would like to know what proportion of the crew and cast in that production were from the ACT.

Mr Pettersson: Give us a moment. I think I know the answer, but I will wait.

MR RATTENBURY: Sure. While you are contemplating that, I will ask a follow-up question. I want to get a sense of whether local industry is benefitting from this and whether there are opportunities for ACT people who want to have a career in the screen industry to get involved in these moments when they do come to Canberra.

Mr Pettersson: Yes, just give us a moment.

MR RATTENBURY: I am happy to perhaps go on to something else and come back to this, Chair, if you would prefer, while the officials are looking for the answer.

MR EMERSON: I have a question about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Procurement Policy—obviously, in the context of business development for this community. I understand that its intention is to increase employment and economic participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I have read about a target of two per cent of government procurement going to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses this financial year. Have we achieved that target and has that been achieved over the last several years while it has been at two per cent?

Mr Pettersson: Correct me if I am wrong: is Minister Steel responsible for procurement?

Ms Arthy: It is Minister Stephen-Smith, I think. This is part of Procurement ACT and it is not related to the Economic Development work. I think it is part of Minister Stephen-Smith's responsibilities.

MR EMERSON: I understand that. Is it not significant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business development as to whether or not they are winning government contracts? I am happy to take the other questions to—

Mr Pettersson: At a high level, yes, it is important, but the actual policy and its implementation would not be for us.

Ms Arthy: With the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business Development Program that we run, one of the outcomes of that is to help grow and develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to be able to compete for government and broader contracts. In terms of government policy, those settings and what the objectives are, that is set by another portfolio area. Our contribution is funding a program to help those businesses to be able to compete or grow—for whatever their objectives are, not necessarily just for government contracts.

MR EMERSON: There is no interface with the effectiveness of those efforts on your part in relation to another part of government, which I understand are not witnesses at the moment? To me, it would seem that one of the main levers that government could pull and that you might be invested in would be whether or not that strategy has been effective.

Ms Arthy: We do talk to Procurement ACT. The issue, when you are asking about effectiveness of a policy, is that you would be asking me to make a comment on another part of government's program. The question is on effectiveness. It is better asked of that particular area. We talk to Procurement ACT a lot, but in terms of how a program is designed and how it is measured, that is for another part of government.

MR EMERSON: Okay; within your remit, have you seen a change, since the policy was introduced in your area, in building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses in the ACT?

Ms Arthy: It is very difficult for us to answer that, because our remit is about growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business development, and we fund a particular program to do a particular series of work to help businesses grow. It is not necessarily tied to the ACT government's procurement policy. Our remit is very much focusing on how we help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses to establish and grow.

Mr Pettersson: We fund and provide a business support program. How those businesses, from whatever line of work they are in, interface with government procurement, is outside our scope.

MR EMERSON: I understand that these policies sit with different areas. I suppose you could say that part of your ambition is to build businesses to where they are successful in winning government contracts. I would think that you would want to know whether or not that was the case. Let us say: regardless of the government's procurement policies.

Ms Arthy: Our program is not aimed necessarily at businesses winning government grants. It is to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who want to establish a business to be able to establish that business, for whatever purpose. That is why I am finding it difficult to answer your specific question when it relates to government contracts, because the program was set up to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses grow. Some of the businesses that we support are in the arts, which are not directly relevant to the contracts that are typically thought of when you think about procurement. That is why our focus is slightly different.

MR EMERSON: Have you seen, based on the support that you are providing, an increase in the establishment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses, employment within those businesses, and the size of those businesses that have already been established—these measurements?

Ms Arthy: Let me check with Ms Stewart-Moore as to whether she has the list there in front of her with the number of businesses that we support. If not, we can provide you with a list of the number of businesses that we have supported and the type of businesses that we do support.

MR EMERSON: You are tracking the outcomes of the support, in terms of uplift in employment, that it is good development—these sorts of things?

Ms Arthy: It is employment. Remember that a lot of these businesses are at a very early stage. These are people who have an idea. It is about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who want to start a business can start a business. There is no simple metric about whether it is jobs or whether it is economic outcome. We tend to look case by case. We contract a company called Coolamon Advisors, chaired by Katrina Fanning, a very well-known Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman here. Her company is responsible for doing that nurturing. Again, our measure of success is really around people who want to establish a business, and whether they can establish a business.

Ms Stewart-Moore: Badji supported 97 businesses, in the time between May 2022 and December 2024. There have been some great success stories. One that comes to mind is Kristie Peters, who is a designer. I know Coolamon worked with her to establish and have a showcase in the Canberra Centre, for example, of her works there. It is quite a personalised service, tailored to the business needs, at whatever stage they are at.

MR EMERSON: Is there an evaluation framework? I take your point. I have run a business before. It is about how to decide whether or not it is succeeding. Perhaps not failing as a business would be the first marker. Is there some kind of framework? I understand, if this was introduced in 2022, you said—

Ms Arthy: Yes, that is right.

MR EMERSON: that we might need a longer time frame, but I am curious to know whether or not that is going to be measured.

Ms Stewart-Moore: If it is okay to take that on notice, I will look to the specifics of the evaluation criteria there, in terms of what we have established.

MR COCKS: Minister, because this is not the first time today that there have been questions around areas of your portfolio that interact with other portfolios, could you tell me what is the extent of your portfolio responsibilities in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business development, and who is responsible for the strategic end of this issue that we have just been trying to get to?

Mr Pettersson: The primary program that we fund is the—

MR COCKS: To be clear, I am not talking about what you fund.

Mr Pettersson: I appreciate that, but I just started my answer—

MR COCKS: What are your responsibilities?

Mr Pettersson: Give me a chance. The primary program we fund is that business support service. As minister for business, I have a broad and high-level responsibility to advocate for the interests of businesses. I do take a personal interest in the plight of Aboriginal businesses. But as to the specifics of all of the programs, I would surmise

that they are largely focused within that program.

MR COCKS: In that case, it sounds like Aboriginal business is within your portfolio. I would ask: what analysis have you done as to the effectiveness of identifying what is a genuine Aboriginal-led business, given the concerns across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community about businesses that are not fully genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led businesses?

Mr Pettersson: I do not have at hand myself the processes that the business support service goes through. Does anyone?

Ms Arthy: There is—

MR COCKS: Sorry, not in respect of that specific service; in general, any work that you have undertaken?

Ms Arthy: That question would be best directed to Procurement ACT. In short, there is a process done by Supply Nation. I think it is a national process, and it does identify whether a business is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or not. We are not across the detail of that because we use the outcomes of it. We do not know how it is done. Procurement ACT would be the best people to direct that question to.

MR COCKS: This goes to the part of the question that I am asking, which is: where is the line of demarcation? Who is actually looking at the policy issue? It is not a procurement question; it is a question about Aboriginal-led businesses.

Ms Arthy: Supply Nation is a commonwealth government initiative, and they are the ones that do that. There is a process whereby Supply Nation identifies whether a business is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business. We take the output of that and use that locally.

MR COCKS: You do not do any analysis here around whether that is the right measure?

Ms Arthy: Again, for our purposes, when we are looking at supporting business, that is all we need. We just need that from Supply Nation. In terms of any other work, and where it is relevant, it would be relevant when it comes to the procurement policy. That is where Procurement ACT comes in.

THE CHAIR: Mr Milligan?

Mr Pettersson: Does Mr Rattenbury want his answer?

THE CHAIR: I beg your pardon; yes.

Mr Pettersson: The short answer is that the production is not funded by us; it is funded by New South Wales. I am not aware of a large contingent of ACT workers being involved in the production. I expect it will be very minimal. It is not based in the ACT. It is a New South Wales production. There are, however, wider flow-on effects for the economy. I understand that a lot of them stayed in Canberra.

MR RATTENBURY: When the ACT does support a production—we have seen others here at various times—do we have requirements, conditions of any support that there be a degree of local ACT involvement?

Ms Starick: Yes, we do. There has been a screen investment fund, and that has been managed by Screen Canberra. That is a \$5 million investment fund that ran over seven years. That fund invests in productions at a point in their production to attract other investment.

A condition of investment, apart from the financial conditions and the economic conditions, is skill development, workforce development and developing that capability here in Canberra, as well as our capability to work with productions around site locations and things like that. The showcasing of Canberra is another feature that we look for when Screen Canberra looks to invest in a production.

MR RATTENBURY: Yes, I saw the Legislative Assembly appear in *Blacklight*.

Ms Starick: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Ms Clay, do you have a supplementary?

MS CLAY: Do we have similar requirements for local talent to be used when we have touring theatre productions down here? Do we a similar policy there so that we are training up local AV talent and training up our local acting talent? Do we have any requirements there?

Ms Fulton: In terms of touring companies, that might be a question for the Canberra Theatre Centre.

MS CLAY: Is it an easy one to put on notice, in the interests of time?

Mr Pettersson: They are right here.

MS CLAY: Thank you.

MR MILLIGAN: How much money is currently available for the arts community for programs and events annually for grants and everything else?

Ms Fulton: Yes. So under the ACT Arts Fund, we have approximately \$11 million per annum. Of that, just over \$1 million is provided to project grants and \$9 million per annum is provided to our 29 arts organisations. Then there is funding through the ANU Outreach Program of \$680,000, and that is for the ANU School of Art and Design and the School of Music to increase participation in arts to the broader community. Then we have small amounts of funding that goes through the ACT Book of the Year and to support arts law services here in the ACT.

MR MILLIGAN: The annual report mentions that there has been \$2 million go towards the Arts Centre in Tuggeranong as well as money for staged major construction works for Gorman House.

Ms Fulton: Yes.

MR MILLIGAN: Does any of the money allocated to that come out of that \$11 million, or is that completely separate—it comes from a separate pool or something?

Ms Fulton: It is completely separate. It is a capital appropriation to undertake those works.

MR MILLIGAN: And it comes under that portfolio or that allocation in the appropriation for that?

Ms Fulton: In terms of the budget processes, it is appropriated as a capital works item, and in those budget periods it came to Arts ACT as a capital work initiative.

MR MILLIGAN: Thank you.

MS CLAY: My question is also on arts funding and return on investment. As part of the Greens Confidence and Supply Agreement, Labor and now the government have committed to increasing our grant funding by at least 50 per cent this term and increasing our arts centre and arts organisation funding by at least 25 per cent, plus indexation. What month will that increased funding start?

Mr Pettersson: I am sure you can understand that we are not in a position to make announcements of executive policy.

MS CLAY: It has already been announced, though—publicly and repeatedly. It is just the timing that we are after.

Mr Pettersson: I am sure, by virtue of you asking the question, you are asking for the announcement of—

MS CLAY: The timing.

Mr Pettersson: Yes.

MS CLAY: Okay. Is there any guidance you can give me about when you might make that announcement of when the timing might be announced? Not to ask silly questions, but we know the funding is coming. It has been announced. Is there any guidance on when people might find out the details of that?

Mr Pettersson: I look forward to informing you when I am in a position to do so.

MS CLAY: Right. Has there been any thought about how the money might be distributed amongst the arts organisations and arts centres, or is that an announcement of policy that I am asking for?

Ms Fulton: Current funding for our arts organisations finishes on 31 December 2026 and for art centres on 31 December 2027. We will be briefing the minister shortly on options for delivering that next round, noting that there has been a call from arts

organisations that they have notice of what their funding is before their grant terminates.

MS CLAY: Sure—and we are noticing that some of them are in quite a lot of financial distress. The Canberra Youth Theatre is not staging productions this year. Has there been any consideration—I cannot really say of bringing forward the funding because I do not know when you are considering the funding—as to the best timing of when that funding might have the best impact for the organisations?

Ms Fulton: That will be a matter for government in the context of budget priorities and budget announcements. So I cannot make a comment, sorry.

MS CLAY: We had a recent government commissioned UC study on the creative industries, which found that our ACT creative industries are contributing \$2.9 billion to the local economy—about eight per cent of it. That report also found that our local ACT creative industries are in decline. Do you have any concern, Minister, that maybe we are not sufficiently funding and supporting the jobs in this sector at the moment?

Mr Pettersson: I am aware of the report you are referencing. I think the definition of “creative industries” as outlined in that report—which is where they get the total economic impact—does not neatly line up with the funding profile that you are referencing in the arts. “Creative industries” is quite broad. If you repeat the question again we will see what we can provide for you.

MS CLAY: Sure. Perhaps, if you are taking it on notice, if you look at the definition of the arts in that report it does go through visual arts and performing arts. It looked pretty artsy to me.

Mr Pettersson: It includes communication and creative services, cultural and natural heritage, design, digital media and media production, festival and public events, performance, visual arts and crafts, writing and publishing as well as arts workers. So it is more than just what artsACT would consider.

MS CLAY: Sure. Do you have any concern that we might not be sufficiently funding and supporting the jobs in our creative industries at the moment?

Mr Pettersson: I believe there is always more to do.

MS CLAY: Awesome. Getting into specifics, which might give us a bit more joy, Screen Canberra delivered funding of \$1.59 million and the annual report said that that created an estimated 427 jobs. That looks like a pretty good return on investment to me. Do you have any guidance on what you consider is a good return on investment when you are looking at funding in the creative arts sector, or do you just give money out and then measure what the jobs are afterwards?

Ms Fulton: I cannot talk to the specifics of the Screen investment—my colleague here might be able to—but we published on artsACT website last year the acquittals from our funded arts organisations. It showed that, of our \$9 million investment, the arts organisations self-generated \$9 million in income themselves. Through that, we were able to identify the artist opportunities that they provided, their full-time equivalent in terms of jobs, direct employment and volunteer hours, but also in terms of their outreach

and the targeted programs on our website.

MS CLAY: From that, it sounds like for each dollar the government spent it generated \$2. Is that—

Ms Fulton: They matched it.

MS CLAY: Is that what you would consider a good return? Is there any sort of guidance on what you think is a good—

Ms Fulton: This was the first year of the Arts Organisation Investment Program. Our intention is that we will collect that data every year and then we will be able to get a bit of a picture on growth or any changes in the market. I would say that, in terms of what we know about the various pressures on arts organisations and the effort that it takes to get sponsorship and philanthropy, that is a positive outcome.

Mr Pettersson: I think it is a very good question, and it goes to a point that Ms Carrick made earlier. You can measure the economic contribution of the arts and creative industries but, fundamentally, not all investment in the arts should be looked at that through that lens. I am not sure that there is a large economic return from building a statue to commemorate important women in the ACT, but it is important as a society that we do things like that. Is there a measure? Yes, you could probably compare different activities and the return, but I am sure that is an imperfect act because there are lots of things that we should fund in the arts that do not have good economic return.

MS CLAY: I could not agree more. I am interested, though, in the general entertainment sector. In some areas we give \$8 million to the horseracing industry. I am not sure what the return on investment is on that. When you are looking at funding priorities in arts and entertainment, is there any cross-comparison about what you are getting for your \$1.59 million to Screen Canberra, which made 427 jobs, versus \$8 million in the horseracing industry, which, according to their report that they commissioned, made 496 jobs? Is there any sort of cross-comparison about what Canberra wants, which might be more statutes of Susan Ryan perhaps, and also the economic value, or is that not ever compared?

Ms Fulton: That is not something that artsACT does in terms of our grant funding. Our grant funding is generally a competitive process or a merit-assessed process. The \$5,000 to \$50,000 arts activity round is a peer-assessed program, and the peer panels make recommendations which go forward to the minister for final decision. The up to \$5,000 grants are assessed on their individual merits that kind of come through. So we are not doing a comparison in that regard. For the arts organisation competitive funding, in looking at the applications that come in, we look at the quality of the applications and trying to match the spread of activity through community cultural arts development through to the creative industries. It is a broad breadth, yes.

MS CLAY: Sure, thank you.

MR COCKS: Minister, I am a bit cautious in asking this.

Mr Pettersson: That is a pretty good start.

MR COCKS: Minister, can you tell me what your responsibility for improving ease of doing business with the government entails? How do your responsibilities overlap with Minister Cheyne?

Ms Arthy: We work together is the simple answer.

MR COCKS: Sorry; I am really keen to understand the minister's understanding of how his responsibilities overlap those of another minister.

Mr Pettersson: I appreciate your interest, Mr Cocks, but you do not get to direct how questions are answered.

MR COCKS: No, but the question is about your understanding.

Mr Pettersson: I am not sure how that would align with the standing orders. You can ask a question about policy. So your question is: how is the government working to improve the processes—

MR COCKS: If you would prefer your officials to answer it, that is fine.

Mr Pettersson: Well, the question you have asked is: how is the government working to improve the processes for business.

MR COCKS: No; the question was: can you tell me about what your responsibility for improving the ease of doing business with the government entails—your responsibility as a minister—and how your responsibilities overlap with Minister Cheyne's.

Mr Pettersson: As Minister for Business, I have a high level and broad responsibility to represent the interests of businesses. Improvement of the government services that businesses interact with—which I think is largely where you are going to—resides within Access Canberra. Through the Small Business Strategy, there was a body of work committed to to improve those processes. What I am doing is asking officials to provide you with more detail on that.

MR COCKS: Thank you.

Ms Arthy: Mr Cocks, the way that we work is that we do work together, noting that we have all got different responsibilities. When it is specifically around the Small Business Strategy and those elements of that which relate to improving government services, we have a committee structure that sits behind, that people do not see, where all the government agencies that are responsible with having an interface with business come together once a quarter and talk through feedback that we have from business. So, in terms of responsibilities, the business portfolio, we are the responsibility for the broad settings for policy relating to the business community, and we do a lot of the interaction with the business community. Then there are different pockets within that where there is more specific responsibilities, which, in this case, is Access Canberra for improving government services. But, as a bureaucracy, we have feedback from the business community in the stakeholder forum, which I mentioned before. That meeting happens two weeks before this directorate committee where we bring those issues in

across government to think through how we address and fix what industry or business is telling. So the minister's responsibility is that more broad coordination facilitation, and then within that there are pockets. There is a Better Regulation team that looks at regulation; there is the night-time economy that looks at the night-time economy; and there is a Better Services team. Then our job is to bring it together.

MR COCKS: Labor's election commitment was around establishing the Business Assist Team. It sounded earlier like that sits in Access Canberra. What is your involvement with that process?

Ms Arthy: They are the one group I did miss out. Access Canberra is also part of this integrated approach to providing services to business. Access Canberra has that very immediate shopfront to business. Again, what you do not see behind is that there is a network where, if a business comes in with an issue, it is then: how do we work across government to deal with that particular issue? Again, we all have distinct responsibilities but it is how we work together to deliver the outcome.

THE CHAIR: Mr Cocks, I am going to have to ask my substantive. With three minutes to go, I want to go to the annual report, page 134, which shows that 678 artists were directly or indirectly supported through the arts activities funding in the 2023-24 financial year. What is "indirectly supported" mean? Also, what sort of activity does that encompass?

Ms Fulton: Going to your question on "indirectly", that might be activities that are providing pathway opportunities or skills development that might not be a fee-for-service type of activity. It might be a festival or a workshop that might involve a wide range of artists being involved that does not have remuneration attached. The 678 artists were identified through the acquittals that we undertook in 2023-24 from our project grants. It goes from very small activities—individual, self-directed or maybe professional development or someone wanting to have time to write a book—to a group maybe wanting to run a music festival or a performance in terms of performance development.

THE CHAIR: So artists or artistic groups, is that—

Ms Fulton: Yes. Under our arts activities funding, artists, arts workers, arts organisations and groups can apply. Depending on the type of activity in any year, that figure will change.

THE CHAIR: As a trend, is that 678 more, less or about the same?

Ms Fulton: In terms of growth, it can change. We set a target during COVID, and now we have a couple of years of numbers and we will reset a target. We can then measure how the activity is responding in that space.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank you all for your attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

The committee adjourned at 4.44 pm.