

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2024–25 Budget Estimates

Melbourne – Monday 20 May 2024

MEMBERS

Sarah Connolly – Chair

Nicholas McGowan – Deputy Chair

Michael Galea

Mathew Hilakari

Lauren Kathage

Bev McArthur

Danny O’Brien

Aiv Puglielli

Meng Heang Tak

**Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee**

WITNESSES

Maree Edwards MP, Speaker, Legislative Assembly;

Shaun Leane MLC, President, Legislative Council;

Trish Burrows, Secretary,

Adam Incher, Chief Security Officer, and

Paul Pamio, Executive Director, Property and Precinct, Department of Parliamentary Services;

Bridget Noonan, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly; and

Anne Sergeant, Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Council.

The CHAIR: I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and I ask that mobile telephones please be turned to silent.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this Inquiry into the 2024–25 Budget Estimates. The committee's aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

I advise that all evidence taken for the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, comments repeated outside of this hearing may not be protected by this privilege.

As Chair I expect that committee members will be respectful towards witnesses, the Victorian community joining the hearing via the live stream and other committee members.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check, and verified transcripts, presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website.

I welcome the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly the Honourable Maree Edwards and the President of the Legislative Council the Honourable Shaun Leane, as well as clerks and department Secretary. Speaker and President, I am going to invite you to make an opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes, after which time committee members will ask questions. Your time starts now.

Maree EDWARDS: Thank you, Chair. Obviously we would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the lands of the traditional owners and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.

Visual presentation.

Maree EDWARDS: I would like to begin by speaking to parts of our strategic plan, which I hope that members are aware of, and that is about greater awareness and access to Parliament through direct community engagement and education. As you can see from the slide, we have obviously expanded our access to the Parliament, including public tours, group tours, architecture tours, and parliamentary garden tours, among others, as well as obviously increasing our engagement with the education sector, students and indeed teachers as well. We have also introduced some measures to support people with disabilities, including the closed captioning for broadcast, which commenced on budget day, 7 May. We have also had an increase in participation for our Parliament Prize, which is something we are very proud of. We have more interns, covering five universities. We have increased our engagement with the tertiary sector as well, particularly with teachers as well as students from universities. I will let the President speak to this one.

Shaun LEANE: Yes, I will just give a brief outline. To start with, thanks, Chair and committee members, for having us this morning. Just a brief outline of the regional setting in Echuca: I suppose the dot points there outline our real appreciation to the Campaspe shire for letting us have their library for that week. I was there all week. It was an interesting exercise standing out the front of the library – there was a lot of notice put out, but some people did not realise that the Parliament had taken over the library. It was interesting bumping into the odd person who asked what was happening, and some would say, 'That's a good thing,' and others would say, 'That'd be right – bloody MPs.' Anyway, it was a huge undertaking by all the Parliament departments –

excellent work. There were a lot of extra activities right through the week, as far as education programs and youth forums go, which some of the MPs that are here actually attended. We really appreciate it.

With the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, I am sort of biased, but I think the Victorian branch is a very active branch. There have been a lot of activities and a lot of support right through the Commonwealth. We will touch on the twinning. I might do them both at the same time. The twinning arrangements also really supplement the work that the CPA does. Only recently staff from the Parliament, the communications team, helped the Nauru Parliament. Their Parliament got its first Parliament Facebook page up only last week so that constituents of Nauru can actually monitor online what their Parliament is doing. It is great work.

Great work with Fiji – and I am not too sure; I am sure they have been here – but the PAEC team from Fiji was here to witness your great work and see how you go about things to then take it back to Fiji. There has been a lot of work. The Commonwealth women's group, with representatives from all sides of politics, have been absolutely fantastic in that, and there have been a number of activities right through, not just with the Commonwealth but in other areas, assisting parliaments. As I said, I am very proud of our CPA. I think our branch is very active. There is the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The big conference of the whole Commonwealth will be in Sydney later this year, and our branch is hoping to be quite active and influential in that. Just once again – great support from the Parliament staff on all these activities, and we are really fortunate to have the people that work for the Parliament that we do.

The CHAIR: Thank you, President. The first 7 minutes is going to go to the Deputy Chair.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you, both, for that presentation. Thank you also to the Secretary for joining us and for her patience throughout the course of the year in dealing with all members of Parliament, although I am probably projecting, because it is probably more patience with me. My first question is to the Speaker, and it pertains to members who do not turn up to Parliament for a sustained period of time. What action, if any, is taken against those members?

Maree EDWARDS: Members notify the Speaker if they are unable to attend Parliament – in writing usually. Members are entitled to be absent for nine sitting days in a row. There is no responsibility for the members to advise why they will not be attending Parliament. Basically, that is the process.

Nick McGOWAN: Have you had any members who have fallen foul of that measure?

Maree EDWARDS: No.

Nick McGOWAN: Okay. Do you know how many members have gone close to exceeding that number of days?

Maree EDWARDS: No. I am sorry; I could not give you that information. Certainly since I have been Speaker, none.

Nick McGOWAN: None, okay. Thank you. Just in respect to incidents inside the Parliament – this is perhaps best a question for the Secretary – are you aware of any reports that an attendant was assaulted or may have been injured in recent protests in the Parliament?

Trish BURROWS: Yes, I am aware of the report. There was an incident on 7 May in the Legislative Assembly in the upper gallery, where the Speaker asked for the gallery to be cleared and gave directions for that to occur. The protective services officers and DPS security team members who were in the gallery assisted in exiting people from the gallery, and through that process an injury occurred.

Nick McGOWAN: I will not ask you how that person is going. Obviously we wish them well, but I am sure you cannot share with us their status. The obvious question that leads on from that is: what measures might now be taken to ensure that staff, MPs and everyone, really, including other members of the public who have come to attend in good faith, are protected going forward?

Maree EDWARDS: Is that to me or to the Secretary?

Nick McGOWAN: I am happy for either of you to answer that.

Maree EDWARDS: I think the Secretary is probably best placed to answer that.

Trish BURROWS: I think it is pretty clear in the messaging from both the Speaker and the President that for all workplace participants in Parliament it should be a secure and safe workplace to be in, and that is non-negotiable. Over the last several years there have been significant increases and improvements of security around the precinct. Indeed before the time of some members here joining Parliament and before my time there has been a continual uplift in security across the precinct. More recently some of the changes that have gone into place are that there are now CCTV cameras in the upper galleries of both chambers, and they are monitored the same way that our other CCTV cameras are. During the times that are generally of most interest to the public, which are question time and special events, there are PSOs in the upper galleries right through the whole period, so they are very close in proximity if there are potential issues. DPS security team members are also there, so every question time and at other times where there might be a special event such as budget day, the notion being that the more quickly you can get to respond the more likely that you can both mitigate ahead of it occurring but also deal with it at the time.

In addition – you asked for other things that are being considered – we have been asked to look at the points of entry to Parliament House as well and what screening systems we have available there to try and make sure that they are contemporary and that we are trying to catch things on the way in to Parliament, so that is also being looked at at the moment as well.

Nick McGOWAN: Can we have some assurance that that is being done with some urgency, because without revealing too much, and understanding that this is publicly broadcast, that would be a significant area of concern for all MPs no matter which side of the divide they sit on, I would think, currently.

Trish BURROWS: As I said, I think the Presiding Officers have been really clear on their absolute requirement that this be a safe workplace and a secure workplace for all workplace participants.

Nick McGOWAN: Is there any exclusion zone that you are aware of in terms of the front steps of Parliament? What are the current or existing orders in respect to that?

Trish BURROWS: The front steps of Parliament are part of the parliamentary precinct. The rules in relation to those have been in place for over a decade, and essentially, in summary, they are that protest activity should occur in the lower six steps. You have got a group of steps, about six, then you have got a carriageway, so it is really in that lower part that protest activity should occur. Other than that, the steps are available to everyone to have their lunch on, take phone calls, chat to people. You will see members of the public across the steps at all different times, and of course a lot of wedding photos are also taken on the steps. It is very busy on a Sunday and a Saturday.

Nick McGOWAN: And has there been a safety audit in terms of the building itself? I spent quite a period of time with the UN, so I can be a little bit over the top, one might say. But, for example, these windows here – none of them are anchored. Anchoring means that should an explosion occur they are actually not going to form a projectile themselves, much less shatter.

Shaun LEANE: Nick, can I suggest there has been that type of work done. We just want to be careful what we do put out on the public record, but I am happy to supply that work, absolutely, to the committee, if that is okay.

Nick McGOWAN: Thank you, President. We have got scanners obviously and X-ray machines. Do you know how many items have been confiscated in the last financial year?

Trish BURROWS: I do not. I will have to take that on notice.

Nick McGOWAN: That would be great if you could take that on notice. Thank you.

Bev McARTHUR: I will go to budget paper 3, page 193, and it is to do with the funding of government committees and so on. For the Secretary perhaps, can you –

Shaun LEANE: It is not a matter for the Secretary. Are you talking about parliamentary committees?

Bev McARTHUR: Yes.

Shaun LEANE: You can ask it to me.

Bev McARTHUR: Sure. To the President then: can you confirm that this budget has seen an 11.4 per cent funding cut to the parliamentary investigatory committees output compared to the 2023–24 budget?

Shaun LEANE: With the committees –

The CHAIR: I am going to stop you there – apologies, President. We will come back. There will be more time, and perhaps the question can be re-asked. We are going to move forward to Ms Kathage.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you, Chair, Speaker, President, officials. Speaker, I know you have been quite passionate about making sure the Parliament is reflective of women. We see having a contemporary workplace is also one of the strategic priorities listed in DPS, page 154. Can you let us know some of the activities that have happened over the last year to help achieve that?

Maree EDWARDS: Yes. Thank you for that question. As people would be aware, this institution is steeped in history, and that history is often of the men who have walked the corridors of this place. One of the things that I have been passionate about is bringing forward the voices and activities of women who have also participated in democracy over the years, and there have been a number of events that we have held. Obviously the International Women's Day event back in March was the second one that we have held, and inviting members to bring women from their own electorates to experience the Parliament has been a really important part of that day.

This year, off the back of last year's International Women's Day event, the President and I put out for tender to have a portrait done of the first woman Speaker and the first woman President. They were unveiled on International Women's Day, and you will see in Queen's Hall the beautiful new portraits of Judy Maddigan and Monica Gould. On top of that, in February we held the International Day of Women and Girls in Science panel in the Legislative Assembly, which was a first and also really, really well attended.

In September last year in regional Victoria for the first time in Bendigo – no preferences there; it was just the way it worked out – the WE Lead, Women Engaged in Leadership, forum was held. We had 35 women and five women MPs attend that forum. Of course just recently in Queen's Hall we held an exhibition of women's health networks across Victoria, which was led by Women's Health Loddon Mallee – again, no preferences there, it is just the way that that worked out. On top of that, of course we have held a few events such as the breakfast around menopause – we are now working towards the Victorian Parliament being a menopause-friendly workplace – and more recently the Respect Victoria Rosie Batty book launch here in the Parliament and the This Girl Can launch. So there are lots of activities happening that are engaging women from outside of the Parliament but also highlighting what has been happening within the Parliament over many decades where women have been leaders and achievers.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you. I know the menopause breakfast was also really well attended and really great. You have said previously that you would like to help more community groups that do good come into the Parliament. Last week we had MND Victoria and Fight MND here. Over the past year have you actually been able to open up the Parliament to organisations like that?

Maree EDWARDS: I hope that is the perception, because that is what we have definitely been trying to achieve and both the President and I have been actively working towards that. The President himself has organised a couple of events in Queen's Hall that have invited in organisations that would not normally be present, such as the Salvation Army and the Big Issue. They were fantastic events – the launch of the recipe book. On top of that, I have done a few breakfasts across my time as Speaker, which I am calling the Speaker's breakfast series, which is a series of breakfasts that invite people from different parts of our community in to present to members about what they are doing in their communities. I have had, obviously, Menopause Friendly Australia; Lifeline Australia, which was led by the Victorian regional centres; Transcend Australia; the young stroke association recently; and Hope Assistance Local Tradies, among others. Then there has been the lunchtime series, which has happened with exhibitions et cetera in Queen's Hall – just this week the Pasifika event, which was so well received; the International Women's Day event, obviously; we have had Men's Shed Victoria present in Queen's Hall; and I have had a JobWatch briefing for members, which was a lunchtime briefing. So there is a lot of activity. Sometimes I think there is a lot more that we could do, but members of

Parliament are very busy people, particularly on sitting days, so it is trying to fit it into the scheduling around what we are doing when we are sitting to encourage members to participate and attend.

The breakfast series has mostly been successful. There are times when members come and go during those events, but I think it is really important for those community groups and those individuals as well to come in and experience the Parliament as it is when it is operating. Some people have never been to this place, and it is a big eye-opener and a big experience for them to come in and see the Parliament in action but to get to meet members of Parliament as well.

Shaun LEANE: Yes, and just to add, it gives us a chance as members of Parliament – it does not matter what political party – to actually thank those groups in person for the good work they do, and I think that is a really important thing. The groups and the individuals really appreciate it. Just to give the Salvos cookbook a plug, which we launched here, it won a big international award. It was announced in France. It came equal first, so it still won.

Bev McARTHUR: Were you there to receive it, President?

Shaun LEANE: I have got to say, Mrs McArthur, that on my phone the text messages from Brendan Nottle were endless that morning – how happy they were. It is just a cool thing. Maree has done a great job, particularly trying to introduce some gender balance on the walls and other places of this Parliament. She should get a lot of credit for her passion and her work in that area and other areas.

Maree EDWARDS: Thank you.

Shaun LEANE: I think our aspiration is to bring in other groups that have not been here before. I think we are going well. We will even ramp it up in the next couple of years.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Kathage. We are going to go straight to Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. Before I go back to some other questions, just a big shout-out for the gas cylinders that are in the courtyard out there. They are fantastic.

Shaun LEANE: It is our pleasure.

Bev McARTHUR: It is wonderful to have gas in the Parliament.

Shaun LEANE: There is all sorts of stuff in the Parliament.

Bev McARTHUR: Yes, I know. We are very appreciative of being able to be warmed by gas, so that is terrific.

President, you mentioned Echuca. Can you give us a total cost of that experience in Echuca, MPs' costs and so on?

Shaun LEANE: Yes, I might hand over to the Deputy Clerk of the Council, who can give you the figures. Do you want to come back to them, or you can give them out?

Anne SARGENT: No, I am happy to. We are still finalising some accounts from that, Mrs McArthur. At this stage it is probably coming in at about \$230,000, but that includes everything – from accommodation and meals to hiring and setting up staging, getting us all up there and hiring trucks to get broadcasting equipment up there. In total, it is looking about that price, but I am happy to come back to you when we have got a final figure.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you so much.

Anne SARGENT: That is all right.

Bev McARTHUR: We will go back to some security incidents, Secretary. How many security incidents took place in the financial year 2022–23 inside the parliamentary precinct?

Trish BURROWS: Yes, just a moment. I think I have that figure.

Shaun LEANE: It might be a good one to take on notice.

Bev McARTHUR: On notice, that is fine. Then the follow-up is: how many security incidents have taken place to date this financial year inside the parliamentary precinct?

Trish BURROWS: So inside the –

Maree EDWARDS: Can I just say that I really think, as was the case with our hearing last year, that matters of security in a public forum are very dangerous, and I would prefer to take these questions on notice. I do not think there is any value in airing some of these security matters publicly.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay. We are happy to take them on notice. That is fine. I do not know how you want to respond to this then. How many concerns have been raised about the disruptive nature of some individuals being signed into the precinct by members of Parliament, with one notable offender? What steps are the Presiding Officers taking in regard to this?

Shaun LEANE: There was an incident in the Assembly – and the Speaker can speak to that if she wishes – actually on budget day, when the Legislative Council was not here. The decision we made after that incident was to not open the galleries to the public until we get to the winter break, and then we will put our minds to the best way to go forward to do our best to ensure that does not happen again. As far as people signing in goes, I am not too sure if we have had that sort of incident with people that have been signed in. There may have been disruption, but that is about it.

Maree EDWARDS: Can I just jump in? Yes, we have, and that has been referred to the Privileges Committee, as is the appropriate course of action. Can I also add that the safety of the people who work in this place, whether it be members or staff – and the Clerk also has responsibility here in terms of employment – is not negotiable. It is not negotiable. Should there be members of the public who think that they can come into the chamber and be disruptive, then our response to that is to ensure the safety of everyone in this place, and that is exactly the course that was taken.

Bev McARTHUR: Well, that is very good to hear. I hope you sort out the offenders. So we will go back to the funding, President, perhaps, of parliamentary committees, especially the investigatory committees. Why is the government undermining the investigatory role of the Parliament by cutting its funding?

Shaun LEANE: I have had a number of conversations with different MLCs around the upper house committees. Is that the area, Mrs McArthur, that you are interested in?

Bev McARTHUR: Yes.

Shaun LEANE: I have had conversations during the last financial year around funding of committees. The upper house committees have a lot of references, and I have said to whoever has come to see me that we will do our best to facilitate those committees. We will resource those committees. I did have a conversation last year with the chairs of the three upper house committees. There was a push then for resources, which we would match, but during the winter break there was one hearing. There was one hearing of those committees during the winter break because the MPs on the committee could not make themselves available. So I put it to the chairs: 'If you're going to make the references, very important, and you want to see them delivered in a certain period of time, then the MPs have to be available to do the work as well as the committee executive.' So I have got my crystal ball out. We have got a couple more sitting weeks until the next break, and I would be surprised if there are many hearings during there again. So I put the onus to the MPs to say, 'You show me the commitment to the reports that I'd like to see, and we will consider more resources.'

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, President. The other cut has been incurred was to the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, but I will leave that –

The CHAIR: Apologies, Mrs McArthur. We are going to go to Mr Galea.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, President, Speaker, clerks and Secretary for joining us this afternoon. President, I would like to touch on something that you referred to in the presentation, which is the

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, something that we both have a lot of interest in, as I know both clerks in the room do as well. You spoke a little bit about some of the activities. I wonder if you could expand on what the CPA Vic branch has been up to and also in reference to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, which you outlined is going to be in Sydney in November this year.

Shaun LEANE: Like I said, we might be biased, but we think our CPA branch is a very active branch that is helping other branches around the Commonwealth, other parliaments around the Commonwealth. Our branch and executive have had a number of conversations that while we are in this position, let us see if we can make some real change, because otherwise there is no point us being there. I touched on the CWP, which is the women's arm of the CPA, and I think they have done some marvellous work. There are some examples where there have been conferences where our members of the CPA have really embraced other women from other jurisdictions and have kept in contact, helping mentor and give a positive contribution to those particular conferences. It is hard to name people, because you forget people, but Juliana Addison, Cindy McLeish, Melina Bath and others have really gone and done some great work in that area – Michaela Settle as well. As I said, they actually have followed up and kept in contact with people and helped mentor.

As for our branch creating change, our executive have been fantastic, from whatever political persuasion they have come to with the conversations we had. There is a big, big CPA conference, a whole of Commonwealth, in Sydney later this year, and we are hoping – we have not got it confirmed – but we are hoping to put on the agenda that there should be an LGBTIQ+ support group in the Commonwealth, in the CPA. I have had a lot of conversations with you, Michael, around how we influence that. I really appreciate Bridget, the Clerk of the Parliaments, our main person that interacts with the general CPA. We have not had confirmation, but we really want to take that to the conference in Sydney towards the end of this year.

Like I said, I am really proud of our branch, and I think we can do more and we can show more leadership. The CWP, and Maree will agree with this, has really done some great work over a number of years and created change and supported women in Parliament. It is a real challenge. We are a Parliament in which more than 50 per cent of the MPs are women – I think we are probably unique – so I think for our parliamentarians here, our women parliamentarians, there is more to be done but they have achieved some amazing things. So to be able to help other parliaments in the Commonwealth and inspire them and mentor them is a great thing.

I think the LGBTIQ+ area is an area that in the Commonwealth is absolutely challenging. There are members of the CPA in jurisdictions around the world where it is still illegal to be homosexual. So it is a challenge, and maybe the best thing we can do is be brave enough to start the conversation. As I said, I am proud of our branch. I think we are leaders. I am a bit disappointed only 77 of 128 MPs are members of the CPA. We are going to have to push that in coming weeks, because it does really, really good work and it is a branch that we should all be proud of.

Michael GALEA: Very, very well said. Always room for more members. I am sure all PAEC members are on the CPA. Perhaps raise your hand if you are a member.

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: Now, I was actually going to go on to the –

Bev McARTHUR: Your list is wrong. Some are members but not listed.

Michael GALEA: I am sure the executive will clear that up before we meet again.

Shaun LEANE: All right. Should I take that slag-off back? Let it stay for the record.

Michael GALEA: I did just want to ask you about the regional sitting as well. Obviously we were up in Echuca just a few weeks ago, and you had a number of other events around it. I was actually going to ask you about the total cost. I am bit concerned that Mrs McArthur and I are of the same mind for once, but I do want to ask about the youth forum.

Bev McARTHUR: On a point of order, Chair, am I being verbally by Mr Galea? What is going on?

Michael GALEA: I was being nice about you. I am being nice. I am saying we are of the same mind.

Bev McARTHUR: Could you repeat it then, if it was a compliment?

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Chair, and Mrs McArthur, for your indulgence. President, if you can just with the time that we have outline some of the other activities. There were a number of other things that were done to showcase the Parliament, but I think more importantly to engage with all the Victorian communities around the regional sitting.

Shaun LEANE: The youth forums I think were fantastic for a number of reasons. There is an education program which our Parliament education unit leads in the primary schools, where around grade 6 students debate what industries they should take to Mars. I was fortunate enough to sit on it. I think we will get more information to the PAEC, but they were so engaged and it was a really cool thing, so if I get time later I will add it. We will send you the thing later.

Michael GALEA: Awesome. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, President. We will go to Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon, Presiding Officers and team. Speaker, can I just follow up a question? You mentioned one matter had been referred to privileges. Can I clarify it? Is it only one MP, or is it more than one – or one incident?

Maree EDWARDS: One incident, Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: But relating to one MP?

Maree EDWARDS: Not necessarily. It was raised by an MP.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay.

Maree EDWARDS: But it is a matter for privileges to determine.

Danny O'BRIEN: I do understand the fine line, both on security and Parliament. I also might just add: I really appreciate the effort and concern that goes into security for everyone in this building, but I do remind everyone that this is the people's building, not the politicians' –

Maree EDWARDS: I could not agree with you more, Mr O'Brien.

Danny O'BRIEN: and I hope that is strongly considered when we are making decisions about excluding people.

Maree EDWARDS: Absolutely. One hundred per cent.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you. I am not sure how I will go with this question, but funding for the integrity agencies – the Auditor-General's office, the Ombudsman – comes within the parliamentary departments. Do the parliamentary departments though have anything to do with those, given that there are reductions in real terms for all of those agencies and certainly on previous revised figures?

Trish BURROWS: No. It comes in the same appropriation Bill, but we have nothing to do with it. We are just all listed in the same Bill.

Danny O'BRIEN: Righto. I thought so. So for the Auditor-General and the Ombudsman – is it directly to the Treasurer? Their budgets are –

Trish BURROWS: You would have to ask the Treasurer. I am sorry. I not sure where you need to direct the question.

Danny O'BRIEN: Ten years on this committee – you would think I would know by now, but it has always been so opaque.

Maree EDWARDS: If I recall, Mr O'Brien, you asked the same question last year.

Danny O'BRIEN: I still do not know; that is why I thought I would try. Can I ask a physical question? In the beautiful annexe that we have out the back, which we are all very grateful for – some of us actually have sunlight now, which is great – we still have leaks. I come in regularly and there are fans blowing in there to deal with leaks, for a building that is only a few years old. What is the story? When is that going to be fixed, Secretary?

Trish BURROWS: Leaks have definitely been found in the building. Some members, I am sure, around here have found them during their time out in the annexe. There have been a number of attempts to try and work out what the issue is and some repairs put in place, but ultimately it is unclear, the cause of those leaks. What we have done this year is engage a large engineering firm to come in and give us the reason: where the leak is coming from, what has caused it and more importantly than that, perhaps, a solution for a permanent fix for that. They are halfway through that process. As you can imagine, they have looked at designs, as-built drawings – they are doing all of their desktop examination of that. They will shortly do some onsite testing as well before they are in a position to let us know why there is leakage and then what the solution is for that. In the second half of this calendar year we will have a solution and ask the Presiding Officers to consider which way to go, with an absolute goal of fixing it permanently.

Danny O'BRIEN: Stopping the leaks from Parliament.

Maree EDWARDS: Pretty much. If only, Mr O'Brien – if only.

Danny O'BRIEN: I have been waiting for it for three days. Can I clarify, Secretary: are whatever defects or issues likely to be covered by builders warranty or insurance?

Trish BURROWS: We have looked into that. I do not have an answer for you today about whether that would be the case, but we have certainly looked at that possibility.

Danny O'BRIEN: On a broader question and vaguely related to insurance: there have been a number of either vandalism or deliberate attacks on MPs' offices. Do we have a cost for those? Are they generally covered by insurance? How would that be dealt with? I am thinking of last week – the Deputy Premier's office. That would have been a significant clean-up cost there.

Trish BURROWS: We generally just go forward and clean those up where they occur. It does depend a little bit on what they are. A broken window might be a landlord issue, it might be a different part of insurance. Some of it might be to do with the local government, so sometimes there are footpath issues that belong to local government, not to us.

Danny O'BRIEN: I am talking specifically about the wilful damage that has occurred this –

Trish BURROWS: Yes. Who cleans it up can a little bit depend on what it is and what is broken or what is damaged – it usually happens overnight. We try to get there first thing in the morning with the main goal of cleaning it up straight away and then dealing with those other matters afterwards.

Danny O'BRIEN: Is the cost of that clean-up disaggregated by the department?

Trish BURROWS: Yes.

Danny O'BRIEN: Can you tell me what it has been in the last 12 months or in this financial year?

Trish BURROWS: I would have to come back to you on that.

Danny O'BRIEN: That would be great if you could. Can I move on to the EBA for parliamentary staff. There was an EBA; I think it expired notionally on 20 March. Is there a new EBA under negotiation at the moment?

Trish BURROWS: The parliamentary officer enterprise agreement is a nexus agreement to the Victorian public service agreement, so –

Danny O'BRIEN: Are you talking about electorate staff?

Trish BURROWS: No, parliamentary officers.

Danny O'BRIEN: Right. What about electorate –

Trish BURROWS: There are a number of EBAs. There is a parliamentary officer one. An electorate officer agreement is still live – that has not lapsed.

Danny O'BRIEN: Right.

Trish BURROWS: Parliamentary officer is the one that has nexus to the Victorian public sector. Essentially, they agree to theirs first. We uplift quite a lot of those terms and conditions and then negotiate some of the different aspects that sit in the parliamentary officers agreement. So the trigger for us to commence that is linked to the VPS agreement, which they have signed a heads of agreement in relation to. That is playing out, and then we will tick off with parliamentary officers.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. So it is not a carbon copy into the parliamentary officers agreement?

Trish BURROWS: Lots of the conditions are the same – salary in particular and those sorts of terms and conditions are the same – but we have, for example, some provisions in relation to parliamentary sitting days and the expectation on the workforce to be here on those days that links to when the house finishes. A government department does not have those same requirements. So there are some specific things in the parliamentary officers agreement.

Danny O'BRIEN: Will the cost-of-living bonus be the same for parliamentary officers as the recently negotiated CPSU deal?

Trish BURROWS: I will have to come back to you on that when we get the final information in relation to the Victorian public sector agreement.

Danny O'BRIEN: Okay. So when do you expect the Parliament deal to be finalised?

Trish BURROWS: Again, because we are waiting for something else to happen in order to trigger it, I think the expectation would be it will happen within the next six months or so, but it is not something that I am able to sit here and say, 'This is when it will definitely happen.'

Danny O'BRIEN: No worries. I assume the old one just rolls over in the –

Trish BURROWS: Correct. It lapses rather than ends.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Secretary. We will go to Mr Tak.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Chair, Speaker, President, Secretary, Clerks. Speaker, in your presentation you mentioned that closed captioning has been rolled out for parliamentary broadcast, which is a fantastic initiative. Could you talk more about that, please?

Maree EDWARDS: Yes. Thank you, Mr Tak, for your question. This goes back to our disability action and inclusion plan that was instigated by the Parliament some years ago. It is actually due for renewal and re-establishment very soon, but it was developed to promote and establish ways that Parliament could be more accessible and inclusive of all people irrespective of their abilities. Closed captioning was something we talked about actually in this committee last year in relation to people who are hard of hearing or indeed who are deaf. We talked about Auslan and Auslan interpretations et cetera. Close captioning was already something that we were looking at as part of that process. Fortunately, we were already on that path, and it was actually implemented across both houses. Obviously the Assembly was the first house to do it, on budget day, and it has now obviously expanded to the upper house as well – hugely beneficial for those who are watching Parliament online to be able to read with closed captioning.

In terms of the bigger picture in relation to disability access and accommodating people with disabilities, we actually looked at what the possibility was of having an Auslan interpreter in house. The call went out across

the Parliament to see if there was anyone who had that skill, and unfortunately there was not, but what we have since determined is that with many of the tour groups that come in, particularly the schools, if they need an interpreter, they bring their own. And we also have the QR codes now across different parts of the Parliament where you can QR code in; it will come up with an explanation or information about what a particular monument means or what a particular piece of art is, what the mace is et cetera. So there are ways of supporting people who come into the Parliament who might have that hearing impairment.

In terms of other access for people with disabilities this building is extremely challenging, and it has a big heritage aspect to it, so change is not easy, but of course we have the rear entrance now where people with a disability can come in if they are physically disabled, to be able to come into the house from the rear entrance and then use the lifts. Of course we are constantly looking at ways to improve access for people with disabilities. I think the closed captioning is a great step forward. It has been a long time coming, but it will make a huge difference, and even for those who are not hard of hearing if you just want to turn the volume down on the live feed so you do not hear the voices, the loud voices, you can just read what is being expressed in the chambers. It is a very valuable tool to have.

Meng Heang TAK: Thank you, Speaker. Through you, Speaker, to Ms Noonan: during sitting weeks we see lots of visitors to Parliament, which is fantastic. Do you have any statistics that you could provide to the committee about the number of tours that we have been conducting?

Bridget NOONAN: Sure, thank you. I am glad you have noted that as an issue. We are very proud of our tours program, which as you said is quite busy in sitting weeks but particularly busy outside sitting weeks. Members of the committee might not be aware that staff from my team hit the road most non-sitting days to do school visits across metropolitan Melbourne areas and probably about five or six times a year visit regional and rural Victoria to set up essentially the same tours program but in a regional area. So over the last year – is there any particular topic you want me to focus on or just stats in the main?

Meng Heang TAK: Yes.

Bridget NOONAN: Okay. So in the year to date, or really probably a couple of weeks ago when I gathered these stats, we have had just over 15,000 public tour visitors. So they are basically walk-ups, so people who do not have a booked tour; they just turn up and visit for a tour. About 3500 group tour visitors, so perhaps a local Probus group or other group that books in for a tour. We have run 21 architecture tours, which we do a couple of times a month specifically for people interested in architecture and design, and 29 parliamentary gardens tours. We have had nearly 8000 school students through; about half of those did a parliamentary role-play. We have had about 3000 online incursion, which I think I have spoken to the committee about previously, where we try and take the tour into the classroom – particularly useful for regional schools. I should just say about the role-play tour as well, there are two different types of role-play – students in years 5 and 6 can book in for an age-appropriate role-play where they participate in passing a Bill, and you see all these children coming into the chamber looking incredibly nervous, and then about 5 minutes later they are all sort of pointing their fingers at each other and banging their papers on the table.

Danny O'BRIEN: Terrible behaviour.

Maree EDWARDS: It is not learned behaviour.

Bridget NOONAN: It does not take them long to ease into the role of a legislator, I can assure you. But then there is also –

Danny O'BRIEN: From the Speaker, obviously.

Bridget NOONAN: a VCE legal studies role play where students pick up a real live Bill that has gone through the Parliament and look at the work that perhaps has gone on in a parliamentary committee to take it to legislation and then their assigned roles. We have had lots of students participate in the role-plays as well. I can give a complete list to the committee rather than me rattling off too many stats, but certainly quite a robust tours program. We are always keen to try and engage with schools who have not yet engaged with us, so if you consider any in your electorates, if there are perhaps under-reached schools, we would like to engage.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We will go to Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you, Chair. Good afternoon. I might just follow on a previous line of questioning. The new members annex has had some pretty well publicised issues with water and mould as well. The Member for Brunswick was quite taken aback to be told that his parliamentary office was unsafe for human habitation due to mould spores. I mean, we have heard a bit about the work that is ongoing. In terms of air quality, do you undertake air quality tests? Could you tell me a bit about that?

Maree EDWARDS: Would you like to answer, Secretary?

Trish BURROWS: Yes, we do. In fact I got the latest results in this morning, with no issues found. There is preventative or proactive testing that is done on a monthly basis, and on a fortnightly basis the team checks for water ingress across the Parliament as well – so we check both the corridors and offices that have been identified as well through that testing. It is an external company that comes in and provides us with the report. Whenever we do get a report of there being dampness – which was the case that you referred to – we immediately get in that company to do testing straightaway to discover what is in the air. Sometimes the air inside is still better than the air outside. They do take a sample outside and inside, and of course on particular days the sample air from outside can also be a challenge. But it is important that we get the assessment done as quickly as possible when that smell has been there or when there has been dampness, and then we treat, with their advice about what needs to happen.

We have also changed a little bit of the way that we activate the air conditioning system in the annexe. It is obviously really busy on sitting days and really not busy on non-sitting days, and the service is activated by movement. So the team turn things on a little bit earlier and a little bit more frequently, on a manual as opposed to an automatic basis, to try and keep that air flow going.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Sure. Yes. Very interesting. Given the work that has been undertaken, are you confident that for the remaining parliamentary offices we have got good air quality based on that testing?

Trish BURROWS: I am. The testing is coming back well, and also the really regular checking that DPS staff are doing along with that proactive testing has given us confidence.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Okay. Thank you. Just moving to another line of questioning, recently I invited a person who uses a wheelchair to Parliament to watch debate, and I know that many people here have probably done the same over time. It really strikes you how much of this building is really not disability accessible at all. It is good to hear about the planning work that it is due for renewal. In that process do we anticipate undertaking an accessibility audit, and will that be publicly available?

Shaun LEANE: It has been mentioned before: being a heritage building, it is such a challenge. There has been the disability action plan, and we are happy to share that with the committee. We have got an opportunity – and it takes time, so it is not going to happen, you know, in the next few months. With the extension of the building and the two levels at the back of the building being able to be occupied soon, that might open up other areas that give us the opportunity to consider exactly your concern and how we can make more disability access. It is a bit like a *Tetris* thing where, you know, if we can move things around, that gives us a great opportunity to consider. We are not dodging from that, but as we said, we have got the limitations of it being a heritage building. But at front of mind is: when we do get an opportunity, how can we make it so much better?

Maree EDWARDS: We have actually already engaged the Australian network of disability to do an audit of the Parliament, in a dignified way, along with other areas within the disability sector, so that the people with disability have a say. That is really important to us.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Yes, definitely. I suppose, with the remaining time, do you think the lack of accessibility of the building has historically been a barrier to people with disability working in this Parliament?

Maree EDWARDS: I might pass to the employers to answer that question.

Bridget NOONAN: Potentially it is. I mean, the building looks intimidating from the outside. We are quite keen through our *Disability Action and Inclusion Plan*, which the Presiding Officers have referred to, to identify any of those barriers. We have done some surveys of staff, but I suppose what we are not surveying is the staff who do not work here. That is perhaps the cohort that you refer to. We are certainly keen to understand

more about people's perceptions of why they would or would not work here and whether there are any barriers that we can dismantle.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Thank you. I, for some reason, thought my time was going to be finished, but I will continue. There is the DPS questionnaire data that is part of this sort of budget oversight process, and there is a table that shows the gender of DPS staff, from MPs to department staff, and it includes electorate officers. Now, that table has men, women, self-described and total. The self-described row is just empty. Purely from my office as an example alone, there are people who do not put themselves either as men or women in those categories, and so they would be in the self-described row, but they are not represented there. I suppose, could you outline what step is missing here for that data to be passed on and recorded appropriately?

Shaun LEANE: That is a really good point. Do you mind, Aiv, if we take that on notice? I am happy to get back to the whole committee. We will take that on notice and work through it. It is a really good point you make.

Aiv PUGLIELLI: Sure. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Puglielli. We will go to Mr Hilakari.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you so much, Chair. It is great to see you all here again. I just had a quick one, and it might be a technical one, on closed captioning. Is that AI-generated or is it human-generated?

Maree EDWARDS: Mr Hilakari, I am not an expert on AI; however, I will ask the Secretary to answer that question.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you so much, Speaker.

Trish BURROWS: It involves AI. As part of that process we use an external supplier, so it does get trained a little bit – for example, on electorate names and people's names. I noticed myself in the last couple of weeks occasionally it will get a family name slightly wrong, but it does get trained on those aspects and over time it will get better and better. It is already, I think, pretty high accuracy, but –

Maree EDWARDS: I believe it is running as we speak.

Mathew HILAKARI: It is running as we speak?

Maree EDWARDS: As we speak.

Mathew HILAKARI: Okay. Well, it is fantastic to hear that. I will be interested to see how it goes over time. I know members of both houses of the Parliament use those videos. Does that AI get included in those videos?

Trish BURROWS: No, it does not. What we have is just for the live feed, not retaining that in the artifact that comes from the film. That would have to be done separately for members if you wanted it as part of the download or as part of the Parliament replay.

Mathew HILAKARI: Could I note how helpful that would be for those people who are then observing and watching those videos later on who may not be able to hear the sound.

Maree EDWARDS: Good point.

Mathew HILAKARI: I would be interested in observing that as well, so I will put that maybe in next year's PAEC.

Maree EDWARDS: Absolutely. Please do.

Mathew HILAKARI: We may come back to discuss that. Despite Mr O'Brien leaving at just this moment in time, I do certainly support his sentiments, and I know you do too, around Parliament being for all Victorians. The almost 300 people walking up to the Parliament and visiting this place – I always say in the tours that I undertake that it is a place for all Victorians. So I hope as you consider over the winter break what Parliament looks like in those procedures – I would really appreciate that.

I might take us to preservice teachers, which you mentioned in the presentation. I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit more about that program, because I have not heard about that one before. I would be interested to hear a little bit more about it.

Maree EDWARDS: Well, I might actually pass that over to the experts behind the education program, which I am not. One thing I will say is that the reach of the communications team and the education team is getting much broader, and it is not just about the students anymore, so we are trying to engage more with those who are the teachers of those students as well. It has been quite successful; I do know that. When you are wandering around on a non-sitting week and you come across a school group and someone points out that you are a member of Parliament, or the Speaker or the President, and suddenly you are engaged in this conversation with the students, that is really heartening, because they really do love that face-to-face engagement, as do of course the educators themselves. I might hand to Bridget to elaborate.

Bridget NOONAN: Sure. I am happy to make a start. I was quite proud of our tour stats before, but of course that is only a fairly small portion of Victorian schoolchildren. As the Speaker said, our education team see that they have a role in, I guess, teaching the teacher and supporting education professionals in their role of delivering civics education. About 300 teachers have participated in the last year in the team's teacher professional development, and I think that they deliver that through conferences, tutorials and those sorts of things. Certainly what the team hears from teachers is needing additional tips and tricks for them in teaching civics and citizenship, so we offer some particular resources. One is being piloted with a group of 20 teachers at the moment just to see if that is effective. I hope that is useful.

Mathew HILAKARI: Yes, that is useful.

Shaun LEANE: And it might give me an opportunity to complete my answer to Mr Galea. I am going to explain it badly, but I was very, very fortunate to sit in on the education program aimed at the year 6s. What they do is they pass a Bill through a mock Parliament, and some of the students become the government, some of the students become the opposition and some of the students – only a couple of them – become the crossbench. But they are still important. The debate they have is: there are 12 industries, and they can only take 10 to Mars. So they are all moving to Mars to create a new civilisation. It starts in the Assembly –

Mathew HILAKARI: I am not sure where this is going.

Shaun LEANE: It is fantastic. The Bill is basically which two industries you are not taking to Mars. I was shocked that one of them was entertainment. These kids were hardcore. They were like, 'We're going to Mars to work,' but they got rid of one – that was entertainment. So it starts in the Assembly, and the government MPs push it through the Assembly. Then it goes to the Council –

Mathew HILAKARI: I feel like you are playing for time at the moment.

Shaun LEANE: No, I am not. I am explaining it. So it goes to the Council. The Council actually have a committee stage where they go through all the 12 industries and they argue about which ones they should keep, and eventually in the committee stage, two of the industries are not making it to Mars. Then there is a final vote. But it is great to hear –

Nick McGOWAN: Why do you point to me, President?

Shaun LEANE: I am always pointing at you. There is a final vote. I said I was going to explain it badly. If you ever have a chance to sit in on it, it is fantastic. I think it is such a fantastic feather in the Victorian Parliament's cap that we have got these sorts of really clever programs that are being developed in conjunction with some other smart people. I got a chance to explain it.

Mathew HILAKARI: Thank you. I was going to ask in the limited time left, because we really are limited: what were the two industries that were gone?

Shaun LEANE: I cannot remember the second one.

Mathew HILAKARI: Take that on notice?

Shaun LEANE: This was in Echuca, and it was entertainment. I was thinking, ‘Wow’. But then, like I said, these kids were hardcore. They were going, ‘We’re going to Mars to work,’ and I thought, ‘Jeez, I hope I never work for you.’

The CHAIR: Such an eloquent explanation, President. That has brought our time this afternoon together to an end.

Thank you very much for appearing before the committee. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses are required within five working days of the committee’s request.

I would like to thank all the ministers, Presiding Officers and officials who have given evidence to the committee today as well as Hansard, the committee secretariat and parliamentary attendants.

I would also like to thank the hospitality, security and cleaning staff who have looked after all of us today.

The committee will resume its consideration of the 2024–25 budget estimates on Tuesday 21 May at 8:30 am.

I declare this hearing adjourned.

Committee adjourned.