

CORRECTED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2011–12

Melbourne — 17 May 2011

Members

Mr N. Angus

Mr P. Davis

Ms J. Hennessy

Mr D. Morris

Mr D. O'Brien

Mr M. Pakula

Mr R. Scott

Chair: Mr P. Davis

Deputy Chair: Mr M. Pakula

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

Witnesses

Mr P. Hall, Minister responsible for the Teaching Profession,

Mr J. Rosewarne, Acting Secretary,

Mr J. Miles, Acting Executive Director, Office for Resources and Infrastructure,

Mr D. Fraser, Deputy Secretary, Office for Government School Education, and

Mr T. Bugden, Acting Executive Director, Office for Resources and Infrastructure, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

The CHAIR — The sound has just been turned back on, for those who are interested in whether or not they are being recorded, and the media can start recording if they choose. I welcome you back for the next session. I

particularly welcome Mr Darrell Fraser, deputy secretary of the Office for Government School Education, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; and Mr Tony Bugden, acting executive director, Office for Resources and Infrastructure, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. I now call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 5 minutes on the more complex financial and performance information relating to the budget estimates for the teaching profession portfolio.

Mr HALL — Thank you again, Chair. As Minister responsible for the Teaching Profession, there is no separate budget line item which is particular to this particular ministerial responsibility. As such, I have chosen to just make some opening remarks and describe to the committee the role and responsibilities that I have as Minister responsible for the Teaching Profession. But there are, of course, items within the budget which are particularly relevant to the duties that I perform as being responsible for the teaching profession to which I will make reference probably during the course of your question time.

As Minister responsible for the Teaching Profession I have statutory duties assigned to me by ministerial order. They are components of the Education and Training Reform Act of 2006, particularly those areas like 2.4 of that act, which covers the government teaching service, 2.6 of that act, which covers the Victorian Institute of Teaching, and schedule 3 of the act, which then covers employment of staff.

In general terms you would describe some of the policy areas for which I am responsible within the teaching sector as: workforce industrial relations; workforce professional development of teachers; matters associated with teacher registration; workforce supply and demand issues, which are of interest to both Minister Dixon and myself in relation to recruitment and retention strategies; and school staff grievances procedures, such as complaints, unsatisfactory performance, misconduct, et cetera. The statutory bodies for which I have responsibility are the Victorian Institute of Teaching, the Disciplinary Appeals Board and the Merit Protection Boards. They are the statutory areas for which I have responsibility.

As I said, there is no specific line item that is ascribed in particular to the Minister responsible for the Teaching Profession, but on the issue of teachers being employed in government schools, there are about 41 000 full-time equivalent teachers employed in Victorian government schools. The wages bill for those teachers is in the order of \$4.07 billion, and the way in which those wages are funded is from the student resource package that is applied to every student who is enrolled in the school. In 2011 that student resource package is around \$4.6 billion, of which, as I said, \$4.07 billion is for salaries. That is around 87 per cent of the student resource package, and 43 per cent of the total operating funding of the department goes towards teachers' wages.

Given that as a brief overview, those are my statutory responsibilities and the policy areas for which I have been assigned responsibility in this government.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister, for your presentation. Just a point of clarification: in relation to the \$4 billion teachers' salaries, that includes on-costs, I assume?

Mr HALL — Yes.

Mr PAKULA — Is that your question?

The CHAIR — No.

Ms HENNESSY — What happened to population growth?

Mr ANGUS — Settle down!

The CHAIR — I am interested, Minister, in relation to — —

Mr O'BRIEN — Supplementary on population growth!

The CHAIR — He is very anxious, but he should calm down.

Minister, I am interested in your comments in relation to the teaching profession portfolio on how predictions concerning population growth have shaped the budget for 2011–12 in the out years.

Mr HALL — That is a very similar question, I think, to what you asked my colleague Minister Dixon when he was before this Chair.

Mr PAKULA — And you are now going to.

Mr HALL — But in a different capacity.

The CHAIR — We will compare all the answers, you know!

Mr HALL — I will not be as expansive as Minister Dixon, because I know he went into a lot of the capital works that are needed to respond to population growth, but I just want to make the point that in relation to funding for the staff who are needed — that is, for the teachers who are needed in our schools — that comes through a mechanism called the student resource package, which is a guaranteed funding mechanism for each enrolment a school has. Where there is population growth, by virtue of that funding mechanism, the student resource package, there is guaranteed funding within this budget to accommodate population growth.

Mr PAKULA — I go back to your presentation and your initial comments about the \$4.07 billion wages and on-costs bill and your responsibility for industrial relations in regard to schoolteachers, which I think you also mentioned. I note that you said there was no specific line item, but nevertheless I ask you: in relation to the state's 45 000 state schoolteachers and also in light of the \$481 million in departmental savings and cuts, can you explain to the committee where the \$1 billion that would be needed to make those 45 000 state schoolteachers the highest paid in the nation is in the budget papers, particularly given your comments on 12 February, when you said, 'My battle will not only be with teacher unions, it will be with Treasury'?

Mr HALL — In response to Mr Pakula's question I would like to be in a position to ask back a question as to where that \$1 billion figure he has suggested came from!

Mr PAKULA — If it is another figure, tell me what it is.

Mr HALL — I am not in the position to ask you such a question, sitting on this side of the table. Mr Pakula asked about teacher salaries, so I want to respond to your question by talking about teacher salaries. Obviously, as this is going to be an important issue, I need to be precise in my answer here.

Current teacher salaries were arrived at by virtue of the Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2008. That agreement expires on 31 December 2011, so funding in this budget — that is, the way in which the student resource package, the SRP, is applied across early years, middle years and latter years in the budget papers — provides for the ongoing funding of teacher salaries right through to 31 December 2011 and provides for a 2.5 per cent increase in those salaries from the period of 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2012.

Mr PAKULA — Two point five is what is in the budget.

Mr HALL — Yes. The budget contains provision for an average 2.5 per cent increase across the salary base for the purposes of EBAs. I think it is important that when we are talking about teacher salaries we look at where Victorian teachers are now compared to other states and the average right across Australia. There are a number of different points from which you can start to measure teacher salaries and make that comparison. If I start at graduate entry level, then the highest paid graduates in any state in Australia are currently in the Northern Territory, which has a graduate entry salary of \$58 457. Victoria sits at \$55 459. The average of all states and territories across Australia is 56 114, so you can see that Victoria is just marginally below the average across Australia at the graduate entry level.

If you look at the maximum of the progressive scale — that is, the scale by which teachers would progress through the different levels if not applying for advertised positions in teaching, such as leading teacher positions et cetera — at the top of the graduated scale of teaching the highest is Western Australia with a salary of 84 863 per annum. Victoria sits at \$81 806. The Australian average is 81 741 across all states and territories, so at the top of the graduated scale for teacher salaries we are almost spot on average, just marginally above average.

Then each state has a different system by which there are advertised positions for which staff can apply, and it depends upon which state you are in. Again there is a different comparison you could make, although it is a harder one to make in that different states have different arrangements for those contracted positions. That is where Victoria sits in terms of other states and territories.

The next point I want to make is that, with the current EBA expiring on 31 December this year, by law, that law being the Fair Work Australia act, the department as the employer is required to negotiate with registered interest parties — parties who have a registered interest in this — and we are required to negotiate in good faith. I say to this committee: that will be done. Those negotiations will be undertaken in good faith. What the law does not permit me to do is to negotiate outside of that process with parties that are unregistered.

Mr PAKULA — No-one is asking you to.

The CHAIR — Let the minister complete his answer.

Mr PAKULA — Are you going to give me a follow-up?

Mr ANGUS — You have had your follow-up.

Mr PAKULA — What follow-up?

The CHAIR — Just let the minister complete the answer.

Mr PAKULA — What follow-up have I had?

The CHAIR — I have not interrupted you; you are interrupting the minister. Minister, proceed.

Mr HALL — As I was saying, what the law does not permit me to do is to negotiate an outcome outside of that formal process prescribed to me by law, so I cannot do that. Part of your question was about salaries. I am giving you a background because so much of the question was related to EBAs and my comments in respect to EBAs.

What I can say, though, very clearly is that we have a starting point to those negotiations, because the government has very clearly stated what its policy position is in regard to public sector wages and EBAs to be negotiated with a number of areas of the public sector. I am aware that the Treasurer and the Premier have both been before this committee and very clearly articulated a position and that that position provides for a starting point for EBA negotiations — that is, current salaries plus the provision of an average 2.5 per cent increase across the EBA salary base. That salary base in the case of teachers is \$4.07 — I think I said 4.06 before. Clearly the other starting point is that it has been articulated by government that further increases beyond that 2.5 per cent are possible if offset by productivity increases.

That is what I am able to say. What I am not able to say is where we are going to end up as part of this negotiation process, because very clearly, as I have tried to describe to the committee, by law I cannot enter negotiations other than in the process which is defined by the Fair Work Australia act. I do not know where we are going to end up, but I can inform the committee and Mr Pakula in particular that in regard to this particular process it will be entered into in good faith. We have a negotiation process, and that process will be followed in the manner in which the law requires.

Mr PAKULA — Minister, I find it extraordinary that you will hide behind the Fair Work Act as a rationale for not restating the commitment that you made over and over again when you were in opposition. Let me say this about the EBA negotiation process: there is nothing — —

The CHAIR — No, sorry.

Mr ANGUS — Point of order, Mr Chairman.

Mr PAKULA — Hang on. I am coming to a question.

The CHAIR — Come to the question then.

Mr PAKULA — Minister, there is nothing new about an EBA negotiation process. You have always known there was going to be an EBA negotiation process, and yet you made the commitment that they would be the highest paid teachers in the nation at every grade level. Now why was it that you could make that commitment knowing that you would have to confront an EBA, and now you hide behind the EBA to refuse to restate the commitment? The EBA — —

The CHAIR — What is the question?

Mr PAKULA — The question is: why could you make the commitment when in opposition that they would be the highest paid in the nation knowing that you were going to have to confront an EBA process, and now that you are confronting the process that you always knew you were going to have to confront you are hiding behind it as an excuse to not restate the commitment?

The CHAIR — I think it is more of a statement, but I will allow the minister to answer it.

Ms HENNESSY — I definitely heard a question mark at the end of that passionate assertion, Chair.

Mr O'BRIEN — It was a rant, and there was nothing in his answer that indicated he was hiding behind any process.

Mr SCOTT — Thank you for the commentary.

Mr HALL — All I want to say is I can express a personal view and I want to see teachers well rewarded for their efforts and the outcomes they achieve in Victorian schools.

Ms HENNESSY — Highest pay?

Mr SCOTT — That is not what you said.

Mr PAKULA — That is not what you said.

Mr HALL — Absolutely. Absolutely.

The CHAIR — Minister, just continue through the Chair, please.

Mr HALL — As I said, the mechanism for achieving that outcome is set down by law.

Mr SCOTT — That is weasel words.

Mr HALL — That is the process we will follow, and I have looked every teacher in the eye in the six months I have been in this position and promised that I will do my very best to negotiate a good outcome for them in respect to all matters associated with an EBA, one of which is salary.

Mr MORRIS — Minister, in your preliminary comments you gave an overview or an outline of your portfolio responsibilities, but I wonder if I can get you to expand on that in the context of the output initiatives identified in budget paper 3, page 18, and in particular if you could indicate to the committee which of those initiatives are relevant to the teaching profession portfolio and perhaps provide details on implementation.

Mr HALL — Thank you, Mr Morris. Yes, I did indicate that there are a number of particular line items and output initiatives in this budget that are of particular interest to me and my colleague Mr Dixon. Some of those are in regard to: teaching profession initiatives associated with the primary maths and science specialists in schools; the science graduate scholarship program, a couple of those; safe schools; professional development for teachers, again listed in my responsibilities; and vocational education and training, because of its flow-on in the higher education and skills area.

In respect of some of those particular area initiatives, in the primary maths and science specialists area you would be aware that there is a contribution of just under \$30 million to recruit 100 maths and science specialists to not only operate within our schools in classrooms but also spend time as coaches as well in assisting other teachers in their school and in their network. That figure, just specifically for recruitment, was over \$24 million over a period of four years, and it is one that I am personally interested in, having an area of maths as a former profession, and I think it will be a much-welcomed initiative.

In terms of the implementation of that, there are components in the budget, as you will see, for the introduction of it this year. As Minister Dixon described to the committee, we have set up a process by which we are receiving advice about the best way in which to implement these policy positions. That will go in part towards the allocation of these specialist teachers and in part to how they will operate as well. So there is a very formal consultation mechanism, which the secretary and deputy secretaries, including Mr Fraser, have been involved in

establishing and working very closely with how they will be implemented. It is the same in those other areas. Professional development for teachers, of course, is an important one, and there is funding in this budget to provide some professional development in the area of behaviour management of students, and also in the area of bullying as well; there is some significant professional development to assist teachers to counter that particular problem.

In terms of the teaching profession I am also pleased that there is ongoing funding committed for vocational education and training in schools. VET in Schools was an initiative of a Labor government, and I applaud them for it. It has lasted the time and grown over that period of time.

Ms HENNESSY — Hear, hear!

Mr HALL — So that is great. Then we have also seen VCAL, which was an initiative of a conservative government.

Mr O'BRIEN — Hear, hear!

Mr HALL — So I think together VET and VCAL have been wonderful initiatives in schools, and I am pleased that we are providing some ongoing funding for them in this year's budget.

Mr SCOTT — I refer you to budget paper 3, page 168, and the education department output summary. I also refer to the Premier's comments to this committee last Friday that class sizes will not be increased as a productivity offset to fund the teachers' EBA. Given the Premier's comments, can the minister please now confirm whether the productivity offsets will be met through cuts to front-line educational services and programs?

Mr HALL — Thank you, Mr Scott, for your question. In terms of class sizes, if I can address that particular issue first, subsequent to the appearance of the Minister for Education at this committee — confirmed by the Premier, I think, last Friday afternoon to this committee — who said that the government had no intention of increasing class sizes.

Mr PAKULA — No, he said, 'Class sizes will not increase'.

Ms HENNESSY — It was a blanket commitment.

Mr HALL — I want to point to some proof of that statement in the budget papers. If you look at budget paper 3 on page 173, you will see very clearly that in regard to performance measures there in the early years for the average prep to year 2 class size the 2011–12 target is 21, which is the exact same target as the previous year, 2010–11. Very clearly, in the early years there is no intention to increase class sizes. So I need to put that on the record.

It is interesting, if you look through the other performance measures in middle years and later years, that there is no such performance measure. Indeed there have never been, so far as I can recall — certainly not in last year's budget — performance measures in relation to class sizes apart from the early years P–2. The reason for that is because if one looks at the Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2008, one sees that clause 23 of that provision, under the heading 'Class size', sets out the mechanism as per the current EBA as to how class sizes are determined. As this is an important issue I just want to quote from the EBA. In terms of class size:

- (1) The principal, as the employer's representative, shall use the consultation provisions of this agreement when considering the class sizes in a school.
- (2) It is recognised that there are varied forms of teaching arrangements (including practical classes, team teaching and lecture tutorials) and different structural options (including P–12 arrangements, senior school arrangements and senior campuses) that optimise student learning opportunities. In addition, the organisation of teaching should provide and maintain, so far as is practicable, a working environment that is safe and without risks to health.
- (3) In this context, and within the fixed resources provided to schools and the physical facilities schedule, class size should be planned on the minimum possible subject to clause 11(6) —

and 11(6) is a consultation clause.

Provided that class sizes should be planned generally on the following basis:

(a) P to 6 — an average of 26 provided that the average class size of 21 at P-2 is maintained;

(b) 7 to 12 — groups of up to 25 students.

There are some guidelines which are provided for in the current EBA agreement in respect to class sizes. I think the important thing that comes out of that is that the actual class size beyond P-2 is determined at a local level by the principal in consultation with staff and is subject to the parameters which I have described there as well. While this might be varied in the negotiations leading up to the EBA arrangements, I want to make it very clear and repeat the comments made by the Premier: there will not be increases in class sizes, but moreover there is no intention of the government to vary the particular clause in this EBA agreement relating to how class sizes are determined — no intention to do so.

Mr PAKULA — You are now talking about the negotiations of the EBA you do realise, which you just said you were not allowed to do by law.

Mr HALL — I was asked a particular question.

Mr PAKULA — And I asked you a particular question too.

Ms HENNESSY — This sounds like a backflip, Minister. This sounds like a backflip.

Mr PAKULA — You just said you were not allowed to talk about the negotiations, and you just told us that you are not going to change that — —

Mr ANGUS — He is quoting the previous EBA. He is talking about the previous one.

The CHAIR — Through the Chair!

Ms HENNESSY — And they apply that clause with the resources of government.

Mr O'BRIEN — There is no suggestion he is talking about the actual EBA negotiations either.

Ms HENNESSY — They do not apply that clause in an abstract vacuum.

Mr ANGUS — No; he is talking about the previous one.

Mr PAKULA — He just said there is no intention to change that clause. That is what he just said.

Mr ANGUS — He is quoting from the previous EBA.

Mr O'BRIEN — He is talking about his general policy.

The CHAIR — Minister, please continue.

Mr HALL — I was trying to make the point how class sizes are actually determined now, and I thought that was particularly relevant to the way in which the question was addressed to me.

Mr ANGUS — Absolutely.

Mr HALL — The issue has been canvassed with other ministers, and in the same way in which the Premier has stated that there is no intention to increase class sizes —

Ms HENNESSY — There was an intention. It was not qualified.

Mr HALL — I am saying that there is no intention of the government. We have no predetermined position about varying what the previous government has already said on the matter of class size.

Mr SCOTT — I understand the EBA negotiations were meant to start in March. Why have they not commenced?

Mr HALL — As I said, the current agreement expires on 31 December 2011. That is seven months away. The government is still determining the management position, and as soon as that is finalised then negotiations

will commence. I expect that that will be sooner rather than later, and it will need to be to hopefully complete negotiations in time to meet the expiration of the current EBA agreement.

Mr ANGUS — Minister, can you please advise the committee what professional development opportunities this budget provides for teachers and school leaders?

Mr HALL — Thanks, Mr Angus, for that question. It is very important that professional development for teachers is facilitated by government — we have a role to play in that. Indeed for registration purposes now teachers are required to maintain certain levels of professional development. On the role of teachers, I have always said it is not an easy profession and there are challenging parts of it but very rewarding parts of it as well, so we need to support teachers in terms of their continual update and acquisition of skills necessary to meet the challenges of teaching. In that regard I am pleased that in this particular budget there are some important funding initiatives that will assist with professional development in the area of bullying. Again there has been some significant allocation of resources to enable all teachers across the state to participate in that professional development if that is their choice. I might add that that professional development in the area of bullying is part of a \$14.5 million initiative that the government has implemented to combat bullying and cyberbullying, and part of that is professional development for teachers.

There is also a commitment of \$2 million to train teachers to help them manage difficult classroom behaviour. Again we think that is an important initiative.

The other thing I want to mention in response to this question was that of leadership in our schools — the importance of leadership and the importance of providing leadership opportunities for teachers and equipping them to undertake that important role of leadership. Again I give credit where it is due to the previous government which set up the Bastow institute, which is specifically designed to deliver leadership programs for leaders or aspiring leaders in our school system, and they do it well. I just want to mention that I was down there just last week having a look at a new module called ‘Developing effective communication’ that was being delivered to quite a large group of aspiring leaders in our schools. I was pleased to be able to get their reaction to what is being provided through the Bastow institute. I was particularly pleased to learn, in speaking to some of them, that they had undertaken some courses there last year in the Bastow’s first full year of operation, in 2010. They were impressed with the quality of them and have come back again for another go this time around.

This is the sort of professional development opportunity we need to continue to promote and make available to those who seek to be leaders. But generally the whole area of professional development is one where we have a real focus as a government, because the needs and the aspirations of teachers need to be addressed by professional development opportunities. I have given you a couple of examples of budget measures that provide for that and some of the ongoing structure that we have in place to provide professional development for teachers and school leaders.

Ms HENNESSY — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 5 at page 31, which shows the total expenses by government purpose and by department, and also to your previous answers. The Minister for Education in the Western Australian government offered their teachers a 9.5 per cent salary increase over three years without productivity offsets, so your position of a 2.5 per cent increase each year would mean that a Western Australian graduate will earn nearly \$16 000 more than what a Victorian teacher graduate would. If you applied that in the context of an experienced teacher, the figure would be in the vicinity of \$35 000 more. With all the rhetoric that the government has had around making Victorian teachers the best paid in Australia, will Victorian teachers be that far behind their Western Australian counterparts, and do you think that is fair?

Mr O’BRIEN — A point of order.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Mr O’Brien.

Mr O’BRIEN — On a point of clarification, was the Western Australian position at the start or at the conclusion of the negotiation period — —

Mr PAKULA — That is not a point of order.

Mr O’BRIEN — It is so.

Ms HENNESSY — No, it is not a point of order.

Mr PAKULA — You do not get to clarify our questions.

The CHAIR — Thank you. I am hearing a point of order, and I am not sure that I am —

Mr SCOTT — Hearing one.

Mr O'BRIEN — There were assumptions in the question when it did not state whether it was the start or the conclusion of the negotiations in the context of the minister's clear answers. It is otherwise ambiguous, and the question could be unintentionally misleading for the purposes and effects of this committee.

The CHAIR — I do not need to hear any more. It is a matter for the member of the committee to ask the question; it is then a matter for the minister to answer it. Providing that the question is apposite to the estimates process, I will allow the question, and in the context of these estimates, clearly, it is relevant.

Mr HALL — Teaching salaries will be part of the EBA negotiations as part of the current agreement and will be part of future agreements. When those negotiations take place I would have thought there will be regard to teaching salary levels in other states.

Mr O'BRIEN — I note your comments in relation to the recruitment of maths and science specialists in your presentation, and I ask: what other recruitment programs does the government have in place to enhance the quality of Victorian teaching workforce?

Mr HALL — Thank you, Mr O'Brien, for that particular question. While the majority of teachers who are recruited to the teaching workforce in Victorian government schools are graduates from universities who have been involved in undertaking an undergraduate degree typically with a diploma of education or a straight education degree, there are a number of other sources or programs which are used to recruit teachers into the profession. I might add that a bit over, I think, 4000 is the number of students who actually graduate from tertiary institutions around Victoria in any one year, of which 2500 or thereabouts end up in Victorian government schools.

As I said, that is where most of our teachers come from — such graduate programs — but there are a number of other programs which are used to recruit teachers as well. The Career Change program is one that I think is a very useful program that has been in place for a number of years now. That provides an opportunity for somebody who has been working in another career with a professional qualification to enter the teaching workforce. Often there is scholarship support for that person to change profession and become a teacher, and sometimes their teacher training is undertaken while they are actually working in schools. They receive temporary registration for the purposes of doing so and complete their work under the guidance and mentoring of another teacher. I was talking to a group of first-year teachers just last week and a couple of them had come through that program and were valued additions because of the experience and varying ages they brought to the workforce in the school.

I have spoken about the maths and science graduate scholarships that are available to assist in bringing teachers into the system. There are also some schemes like Teach for Australia, for example. This is another avenue the Victorian government has committed to. Again I give credit to the previous government which spent \$7.6 million over two years to recruit teachers from the first two cohorts of that program. Hopefully we will be able to do that within budgetary measures in the future as well. That provides the opportunity for many of the outstanding graduate candidates to work in schools while they complete their formal teacher-training qualification under some mentoring and guidance. There are a number of other programs like Graduate Pathways Scholarship and Career Convert Scholarship. There are student teacher practicum schemes, and quite a deal of work is being undertaken in that area to improve the quality of teacher training. They are just some of the areas by which we can recruit teachers.

I have to say in terms of a concluding remark on this subject that the quality of teachers we have in our Victorian schools now is absolutely first class. Part of my role as Minister Responsible for the Teaching Profession is to ensure that their contribution to learning outcomes is recognised. I want to say to Mr O'Brien and the committee, Chair, that I take every opportunity to promote the profession. By some they are maligned,

but in my view and that of the vast majority of parents respect the role they play and give credit to the outstanding quality of Victorian teachers. I seek to promote that and uphold that quality for teachers.

Ms HENNESSY — So let's pay them well, Minister.

Mr PAKULA — Minister, I just want to go back to the \$481 million in savings across the DEECD and refer to page 92 of budget paper 3, which has the \$1.56 billion of savings broken down. This is before the additional GST-related savings. If you look at 'External legal advice', there is a saving over the forward estimates of about 70 million. That is before you get to the additional savings that were outlined in this budget. I am interested in how much of that external legal advice 70 million will have to be found by your department.

I ask in the context that for the Department of Education, as I understand it, the bulk of money for external legal advice is expended on schools defending themselves against claims about all manner of things. How much of that initial \$70 million, maybe more now, in legal advice has to be borne by education, and is a consequence of that going to be that schools will need to find a contingency in their own budgets to fund legal defences against a whole range of possible claims?

Mr HALL — This is a question I might have to throw to my acting secretary to respond to, in terms of finding an accurate answer.

Mr ROSEWARNE — The department is still finalising the breakdown of the savings requirement. The committee has seen the figures there, which were the initial savings, and then there were the additional ones. The adjustment has been made to the department's forward estimates. What the government is now seeking is clarity and finalisation of the breakdown of those numbers. That is the task that is still ongoing. That will be completed by 30 June ready for implementation from 1 July.

In terms of the specifics that have been asked around legal expenses, I cannot provide that today, but by 30 June the department will finalise the breakdown of all the savings components that will be implemented to achieve the savings requirement.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Are you happy to take it on notice?

Mr PAKULA — Yes, just to take it on notice, including the part about whether schools will need to find contingency in their own budgets for possible legal defence actions.

The CHAIR — Thank you. That brings us to a conclusion of the budget estimates for the portfolios of higher education and skills, and the teaching profession. I thank the minister and departmental officers for their attendance today. It has been another useful session. Where questions were taken on notice and where there are unasked questions the committee will follow up with you in writing at a later date. The committee requests that written responses to those matters be provided within 21 days.

Witnesses withdrew.