

VERIFIED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2013–14

Melbourne — 24 May 2013

Members

Mr N. Angus
Ms J. Hennessy
Mr D. Morris
Mr D. O'Brien

Mr C. Ondarchie
Mr M. Pakula
Mr R. Scott

Chair: Mr D. Morris
Deputy Chair: Mr M. Pakula

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

Witnesses

Mr R. Smith, Minister for Youth Affairs;
Ms K. Haire, Deputy Secretary, Community and Executive Services,
Mr H. Klein, Director, Youth, Disability and Women's Affairs,
Ms G. Callister, Secretary, and
Ms J. McCabe, Director, Community and Economic Participation, Department of Human Services.

The CHAIR — We will resume the hearing. We move onto session no. 47, the youth affairs portfolio. I welcome back Ms Gill Callister, Secretary of the Department of Human Services, together with Katy Haire, Deputy Secretary, Community and Executive Services; Mr Harald Klein, Director, Youth, Disability and Women's Affairs; and Ms Jill McCabe, Director, Community and Economic Participation. I call on the minister to give a short presentation of no more than 5 minutes on the more complex matters relating to the youth affairs portfolio.

Overheads shown.

Mr SMITH — Just to give the committee a quick run-down on the young people in Victoria, there are over 1 million young people aged between 12 and 25 living in Victoria, and this represents about 19 per cent of the Victorian population. We all agree that young people are critical to the future economic and social wellbeing of this state, and their involvement in the economy and community will certainly help underpin our state's future and their ideas and innovations will be critical in assisting the building and development of the economy. We all know that this generation will be the ones to make future decisions in our governments and our local communities, and that is why we are committed to supporting those young people.

Statistics tell us that most young people today are healthy, they are active and they are involved in education, employment and community life. But they do face challenges which are unique to their generation, and these include a delayed transition from family life to independent living, increased interaction via social media, a greater sense of personal empowerment and living in a rapidly growing and changing community.

Earlier I released the coalition government's youth statement *Engage Involve Create*, which outlines the Victorian government's vision to support the aspirations of young Victorians and assist them in participating in the social, economic and civic life of Victoria. This was very well received by the sector, and it is the principal document that drives our funding decisions and the directions that we take in this portfolio.

The youth statement is driving an active partnership agenda with business, philanthropic and other organisations to support young Victorians. We can all agree that youth are not the sole responsibility of government, but they are a responsibility of all our communities, including business, and certainly everyone needs to be involved to ensure we get the great outcomes that we are aiming for. The statement that we put out and the programs that we are running in conjunction with that have been very effective. We have had almost one in five young Victorians participate in one of our programs, which indicates that many young people support these initiatives and also these programs support young people to volunteer and get involved in their communities. They help them access mentoring activities that build skills and self-esteem. We offer a greater diversity in career pathways, and we also very much push the responsible use of social media.

This slide is just an overview of some of the programs and initiatives that we have within the youth affairs portfolio. Just to quickly go through some of them, we have the Be Heard! program, which has put a number of young people through community radio stations, giving them mentoring opportunities. There is the Advance program, which is run through most of Victoria's secondary schools and which gives young people again the opportunity to be involved in a number of volunteer organisations, and that has been a very successful program that has been run now for quite a number of years. The AFL Rookie Reporter program has been another great one.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Great program.

Mr SMITH — A great program. That program has basically put five young people through AFL media. They will be there for 12 months from when they began, and they will have access to AFL coaches, players and the whole length and breadth of the AFL media unit. They will certainly be able to generate a lot of mentoring opportunities and contacts going forward. As I said, there are a number of programs there. We could go through them all, but probably now is not the time.

Some more of the focuses that we have are shown on that slide. Youth Central, as you can see, had almost 300 000 unique visitors in the past year. It is a great reference point for young people. We relaunched the Youth Central brand just recently, for the first time since 2007. Again, that has a number of programs on it: the Get Published program, the rookie reporter program that helps young people not only express their views but also get some experience in writing and putting forward some of their reviews and things of that nature. The Youth Partner Network focuses on the youth statement's aim of getting as many organisations involved in getting

good outcomes for as many young people as possible. Also, we continue to support YACVic with a number of research papers and a number of other things.

On the new funding in the portfolio, I am very pleased to say that the budget in the youth portfolio has gone up from last year. Part of that is the new \$2 million over four years that we have been provided to drive a new youth enterprise strategy. There are a number of really good initiatives in that strategy that hopefully I will have the opportunity to talk about later.

That is pretty well it. As I said, Youth Central is the principal point for many of our programs, and I encourage members of the committee to get online as quickly as you can and have a look at what is going on in the youth space.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. We have about 20 minutes left for questions so I will go very quickly to Mr Angus.

Mr ANGUS — Minister, thank you for your presentation. I refer you to budget paper 3, page 170, where it notes the total output cost of \$17 million for youth affairs in 2013–14, and I know you touched on that in your presentation as well. Can you outline for the committee the funding being provided to the scouts and guides infrastructure improvements?

Mr SMITH — We continue to enthusiastically support our scouts and guides groups. Our \$5 million commitment coming into government has been very well spent, I have to say, and in working very closely with the scouts and guides we have been able to fund the redevelopment and expansion of the scout camps up at Gilwell Park and the guide camps at Iluka and Britannia. That has enabled scouts and guides right across the state to be able to use these facilities to a much greater degree and enjoy them more. It has also given opportunities, particularly with Gilwell Park, for other organisations to hire those facilities. That has been a really good outcome.

The best outcome has been with the partnership we have in renovating or doing up or improving the scout and guide halls right across the state. In this year's budget we will continue to see funding allocated to some of these scout halls. As all committee members would know, we have scout and guide halls in our electorates and right across the state, and many of them were built some time ago and are in some state of disrepair. What we have been able to do is allocate — through a panel that includes the guides and the scouts — money towards the improvement of those particular scout halls. The scouts have contributed a fair amount of money towards the improvement as well, so they have been able to leverage off our money and get some great improvements.

Just as an example to talk to the disrepair or the state of some of these scout halls, the Broadford scouts are in a hall where our funding, along with the scouts' contribution, has been able to put an insulated wooden floor over the concrete slab that has been there for decades. You can imagine the winters in Broadford and trying to operate a scout group on that sort of floor. They have been able to put insulation in the ceiling; they have been able to put an indoor toilet in there. They have made a scout group which caters to around 60 scouts — joeys, cubs, rovers and venturers as well as the scouts. They have been able to make it a much more conducive place to meet, and that is just one example.

That example has really been replicated dozens and dozens of times right across the state, so it is a really important initiative and an initiative we are very pleased to be able to continue to fund through this budget. I think the partnership that we have got with them is unrivalled, and I have been told that we are the first government to actually support them to the degree that we are. We do that because we very much support the values of the scouts and guides around respect, relying on each other and mateship, and the mentoring opportunities that are also absolutely fantastic for the young kids. We are very, very pleased to be able to support them, and they are certainly two organisations that are delivering great outcomes to our young people.

Mr SCOTT — Minister, in your presentation you talked — and I believe it was in the context of the aims to get young people engaged in further education and training pathways and employment — about a statistic showing that a majority of young people are involved in education and employment, from my memory of your presentation and the notes I took at the time. The budget has projections for unemployment for the general community, but I cannot find a projection for youth. You made reference to the statistics relating to youth employment, or unemployment — obviously via corollary. Can you give the committee what the youth unemployment rate is projected to be over the forward estimates?

Mr SMITH — Do you want the figure for young people not attending full-time education but looking for work, the figure for young people who are attending full-time education but also looking for work, or do you want the total?

Mr SCOTT — I am happy to have all three.

Mr SMITH — I ask the question because at various times your leader, the Leader of the Opposition, and other members have used various different figures at different times for different reasons.

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR — Order! Do we want to pause, or do we want to take advantage of the 15 minutes we have left in this session? The minister can ask a question, which he has, to clarify. Mr Scott, and no-one else, to respond.

Mr SMITH — Which figure are you after?

Mr SCOTT — Since you have offered three separate figures, I am happy for the standard definition as provided by the ABS to be used.

Mr SMITH — The ABS uses each of those standards. Previously the opposition has used the total, but most recently they have used the figure for people not in full-time education.

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR — Order! Minister, Mr Scott has indicated he would welcome all three.

Mr SMITH — Okay — —

Mr ONDARCHIE — You have to be better prepared than this, Robin, really.

Mr SMITH — You need to give me some idea of what exactly it is you want.

Ms HENNESSY — What is your budget assumption, was his question.

The CHAIR — Order! Minister, we have a question. It has been clarified.

Mr SMITH — Yes, I am answering.

The CHAIR — I would appreciate it if you would respond with the information.

Mr SMITH — The budget assumptions do not include a specific figure for youth unemployment, which you would know if you had a look through.

Mr SCOTT — I actually stated that to you. I asked you to provide — —

Mr SMITH — Yes, so you know. You know they do not exist there, but you have asked me where are they, and you do not know which particular figure you are asking me about.

The CHAIR — Order! Minister!

Mr SMITH — Sorry, Chair. Please continue.

Mr ONDARCHIE — You should have just said, 'Please, Minister, help me — —

The CHAIR — Order! Mr Ondarchie! You have been here two weeks. You know how it goes. This is session 47, and yes, 4 o'clock is looming large, but let us just keep it nice until the end. With the assistance of the minister we can achieve that outcome.

Mr SMITH — Certainly, Chair.

Mr O'BRIEN — I would like to return to the budget papers, budget paper 3, page 170, and ask importantly about what the government is doing to support young people to develop and sustain their own business enterprises. I know that the budget paper includes an important performance measure — in fact the first performance measure — which refers to participation by young people in programs that provide opportunities to get involved in both social and economic life in their communities.

Mr SMITH — Thank you for a question that is actually in the budget papers.

Members interjected.

The CHAIR — I have made a polite request for everyone to behave, including the minister. I would appreciate a straight question and a straight answer in the 12 minutes remaining in this session.

Mr SMITH — Mr O'Brien, thank you for your question. The new initiative that we have in the budget, the youth enterprise strategy, is a really exciting initiative — \$2 million over four years has been allocated. The youth enterprise strategy has a number of components to it, and it is quite amazing what we have been able to get for those dollars.

At the outset we are going to establish a youth enterprise web portal through Youth Central. As I said, Youth Central is a great resource for young people. That portal will basically provide links to existing courses and programs, volunteering and mentoring opportunities for young people and will also have information on it for enterprise development. One of our key strategies, as I said earlier, through our youth statement is to engage young people in enterprise.

The second part of the strategy will be to establish a youth partner network, which is basically to bring a forum together to engage business interests and resources so that young people can access that, and bring together expert speakers to talk about best practice in business for growing entrepreneurs — for new young entrepreneurs who want to get something started so that they can hear from people who have been around the block a few times how to make that happen.

This network will also help young people meaningfully engage with business groups and philanthropy so they can perhaps access some funds through that discussion. We will have structured mentoring opportunities to bring these potential partners together, so another really good part of the whole youth enterprise strategy.

Another part is the business mentoring program, which will be delivered in conjunction with DBI. We are going to connect experienced business mentors with young people who want to establish a business, who want to improve an existing business, and address issues such as financial stability and growth. We are aiming with some of this funding to have 36 young people each year over the next four years have access to that specific business mentoring.

As part of the package we will also be leveraging off an existing DBI program that provides small business with a training program, and we will be focusing aspects of that program to highlight the skills that young people need to be successful in a small business.

Around social enterprises, as part of the package we are also going to identify and support two new youth social enterprises each year for the next four years and provide an integrated package of support, training and investment to make sure that we can grow and make sure we have the stability of those two new youth social enterprise ideas.

Finally, through Social Traders we are going to be working with up to five existing youth social enterprises per year to help them achieve some financial stability. This program will provide around 25 days a year of mentoring. There will be free access to a series of tailored workshops to make sure that these social enterprises can progress. One of the real focuses that we have had is being able to partner with youth organisations who have a good track record of getting really good outcomes. As part of this package and as far as track records go, Social Traders has worked with a number of youth social enterprises in the past, and they have had a great outcome of 100 per cent increase in turnover by those organisations over the last couple of years. We are looking to fund Social Traders to deliver these similar sorts of outcomes to, as I said, five existing youth social enterprises per year. All in all, it is an absolutely fantastic package. It helps a number of young people over the course of its budgeted time, and I am really excited about it.

Ms HENNESSY — It is not a question about youth unemployment, so we can all relax. I want to ask a question about social enterprises as well and the funding available, this 500k available per annum. Last Wednesday Minister Asher gave evidence to this committee that the amazing programs that are run by the YMCA Bridge Project and Whitelion, that their funding is going to cease as at the end of 30 June this year. They have got a very well measured, demonstrated track record of success around getting young people into employment. I am wanting to clarify how much of the \$500 000 per annum that is available would be available to organisations like YMCA and Whitelion, who run social enterprises?

Mr SMITH — As I have already spoken about in the last answer, many of the programs will be run by DBI, and we will be supporting DBI financially by making a contribution through the Office for Youth to focus those existing programs on young people. I spoke about how some of the funding would go towards Social Traders to help run their organisation, so the package we have put in place is very structured for programs to be run by specific organisations, being the government department and Social Traders. Of course through the partnership networks there will be opportunities for youth organisations, philanthropic groups and business groups alike to all have a part in helping forward the enterprise ideas of young people, but it is not a competitive grant round — it is a structured package which delivers specific outcomes to be delivered by specific organisations.

Ms HENNESSY — That was helpful in understanding it. What amount is available within that \$500 000? You gave evidence before in your answer to say that there will be some projects and programs available for philanthropic organisations but it is not a grant program. Can you help us understand how organisations like YMCA or Whitelion might be able to access some of that funding or be involved with the programs?

Mr SMITH — There seems to be a misunderstanding here — —

Ms HENNESSY — But if the answer is none — —

The CHAIR — Order!

Mr SMITH — Some dollars could flow to agencies if they are the ones who are assisting a youth enterprise idea, but, as I say, there are a number of programs. The Engage program, for instance, is a funding program I have of over \$12 million that funds 102 organisations across the state, whose programs delivers great outcomes for training, for education, for mentoring, for volunteering, a whole range of things. There are, or there have been, grant programs that are now in place that many organisations could access. We also support community youth radio, scouts and the YMCA through the Youth Parliament. There are a number of programs where a number of organisations are supported. I think at my last count, if we count the Engage and Advance programs that we run through schools, we have something in excess of 380 partnership programs where different organisations have been able to take part.

This government is very big on making sure that we partner with organisations to get fantastic outcomes for young people, both at risk and kids who just want to have the opportunity to further themselves and do well and have all the opportunities we want to give people. As I say, this particular program is very structured and there are opportunities if they want to support some youth enterprise, but it is not a competitive grant rounds process, unlike the other programs we have in place.

Mr ONDARCHIE — Minister, budget paper 3, page 170, talks about young people accessing programs to enhance their social and economic opportunities. As a former school council president, I was really interested in how kids got involved in music and theatre, and the Rock Eisteddfod is something that was of interest to me. I know it is of interest to Mr O'Brien as well. Minister, what has happened to the funding for the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge?

Mr SMITH — It was very disappointing to a lot of schools that the previous government cut their funding for the Rock Eisteddfod. I think there were a lot of very disappointed people. It was quite a callous thing to do, particularly in the early stages — —

Ms HENNESSY — Like cutting the YMCA and cutting the Whitelion programs?

Members interjecting.

Mr SMITH — I am not sure that I have actually cut any Whitelion programs.

Ms HENNESSY — Your government has.

Mr SMITH — I am not sure I am responsible for areas outside my portfolio.

Ms HENNESSY — So young people getting a job?

Mr ONDARCHIE — Sorry, Chair, I thought — —

The CHAIR — Mr Ondarchie has asked a question. Apart from me, every other member of the committee present has asked a question and received a response. I am sure Mr Ondarchie is keen to receive a response before 1.00 p.m. as well, so if we could just listen to the minister and hear the response.

Mr SMITH — We were very pleased to come to office with a commitment to support the Rock Eisteddfod over the next four years with a commitment of \$800 000. Certainly over the last two years, with \$200 000 each year, we have been able to contribute to what has been a great opportunity for young people not just to perform but to be involved in the organisation of these events and the communication — —

Mr ONDARCHIE — Like production?

Mr SMITH — Production, and all the organisational skills they will gain from putting a production like this together, and they are skills that they will be able to transfer into careers as they move forward.

It was very unfortunate late last year or early this year for the Rock Eisteddfod foundation to say that due to declining numbers they were unable to continue going forward. We could easily have taken our bat and ball and our remaining \$400 000 and gone home, but not this government.

Mr ONDARCHIE — So what have you done?

Mr SMITH — We were very keen to look out for other opportunities that might present themselves, and we were very pleased to join with the Wakakirri foundation, who run primary school events of a similar nature, and with our funding they are able to expand that out to secondary schools as well. While the Rock Eisteddfod is not continuing, through our funding we will still be able to provide young people with those opportunities to perform and to enjoy the excitement of being part of a production, and they will be able to maintain all those transferable skills that I talked about earlier into the future. I am very pleased that we have been able to find an alternative, and through the partnership with Wakakirri we will still get the outcomes that we pledged we would commit funds to two and a half years ago.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. That concludes the hearing for the youth affairs portfolio. I thank Ms Callister and her departmental officers for their attendance today. Minister, where questions were taken on notice, and I think there was one on the environment and climate change portfolio, we will write to you with details of that, but we request that if at all possible you respond within 21 days to enable timely reporting to the Parliament.

Mr SMITH — Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR — That concludes the hearing.

Witnesses withdrew.