

2005

THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

TABLING STATEMENT

Government Responses to:

Standing Committee on Public Accounts: Report No. 3 – Report on 2003-04 Annual and Financial Reports of the Chief Minister's Department, Department of Treasury, Department of Economic Development and related entities and ACT Legislative Assembly – August 2005;

Standing Committee on Legal Affairs: Report No 1. – Report on Annual Reports 2003- 2004: Department of Justice and Community Safety and related entities – June 2005;

Standing Committee on Planning and Environment: Report No 8. - Inquiry into Referred Annual and Financial Reports 2003-2004: Department of Urban Services, ACT Planning and Land Authority, Land Development Agency and related entities – May 2005;

Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People: 2003-2004 Annual and Financial Report: Department of Education and Training and related entities, Office for Children, Youth and Family Support – May 2005.

Tabled by
Jon Stanhope MLA
Chief Minister

I am pleased to present the Government's Responses to four Standing Committee reports on the Annual and Financial Reports for 2003-04.

Like last year, I am tabling the responses to all of the Standing Committee reports covering all portfolios. This is because the Standing Committee reports generally cover more than one Minister and more than one portfolio and, in certain cases, issues raised in the reports apply to all departments and agencies.

As members will be aware, annual and financial reports are prepared by agencies in accordance with the Chief Minister's annual report directions and in accordance with the *Financial Management Act 1996*. The government seeks to ensure that the directions and the Act are continually updated to reflect best practice and full accountability in accordance with government policy. In line with this approach, some of the issues raised in the Committee reports have already been addressed in the 2005 Annual Report Directions.

The four Standing Committee reports made a total of 19 recommendations. In broad terms the Government supports 16 of these, with 2 recommendations noted, and 1 recommendation not agreed.

The issue where the Government does not agree with the recommendations of the Committee concerned relates to reporting in Annual and Financial Reports of the quantity and quality of volunteerism in ACT Government departments and related entities.

Guidelines on volunteerism in the ACT Public Service are currently being developed, including how volunteerism should be reported across Government.

While some agencies already include qualitative information on the use of volunteers in their Annual Reports, the Government believes that the most comprehensive source of information on the volunteer workforce is available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and that it is not necessary for quantitative information on volunteerism to be

included in Agency annual reports. The ACT Government contributes to the ABS Voluntary Work Survey and the General Social Survey which includes a full volunteer survey and is proposed for publication in January 2007. The General Social Survey will provide information on quantifying unpaid work, and recognising its social and economic value.

Overall, however, I am sure the Assembly will agree that the Government has responded in a manner that enhances our record of openness and accountability.

I would like to thank the Standing Committees for the effort they have made in preparing their reports.

Mr Speaker, I commend the Government's Responses to the Assembly.

2005

THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR
THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Standing Committee on Education, Training and
Young People

Report No. 1

Report on 2003 to 2004 Annual and Financial
Reports Department of Education and Training and
related entities, Office for Children, Youth and
Family Support - May 2005

Tabled by
Jon Stanhope MLA
Chief Minister

15/12/05

Government Response

Report No. 1 of the Standing Committee on Education, Training and Young People
Report on 2003 to 2004 Annual and Financial Reports: Department of Education and Training and related entities, Office of Children, Youth and Family Support – May 2005

Introduction

The Annual Reports of all ACT Government agencies are referred to the Standing Committees of the ACT Legislative Assembly for examination and report.

The Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity reviewed annual reports for:

- Canberra Institute of Technology
- Department of Education and Training
- Office for Children, Youth and Family Support
- Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Board
- Cultural Facilities Corporation

The Committee makes 5 recommendations.

Response to Committee Recommendations

Recommendation 1

2.5. The Committee recommends that annual reports accurately reflect the full governance arrangements of the agency throughout the entire year.

Government Response

Agreed. The organisational charts that were included in the Department of Education and Training's Annual Report 2003-2004 presented the organisational structure and personnel occupying key positions as at July 2003 and June 2004. This approach was taken due to the numerous personnel changes throughout the year and changes to structure.

Within the Chief Executive Review section of the report (1.1 Major issues, challenges and achievements for the reporting year) it was indicated that during part of the reporting period of the Inquiry undertaken by the Commissioner for Public Administration, Mr Tim Keady acted as Chief Executive of the department.

Detailed information of the occupant(s) of the position of Chief Executive and more extensive information of the governance arrangements of the department throughout the reporting year will be included in future reports.

Recommendation 2

2.13. The Committee recommends that reporting agencies improve the level of discussion and analysis in reports, including clear and plain explanations of the intent, meaning and

variances in performance measures, and including discussion of challenges and difficulties faced by the agency.

Government Response

Agreed. In the Department of Education and Training's Annual Report 2003-2004, the performance measures incorporated finance measures with material variances requiring explanations. Financial terminology was used in the explanations to provide factual, precise reasons for material variances.

For the 2005-2006 financial year, all ACT departments initiated changes to performance measures according to Department of Treasury guidelines. New measures have been introduced to enable reporting on effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of services and Early Intervention was identified as a cross-agency output. The 2004-2005 reporting will constitute a transition model with the aim being to move to triple bottom line reporting.

The department notes the concerns of the Committee regarding clarity of documentation, and every attempt will be made to clarify the explanations given in the notes to the measures.

Recommendation 3

2.18. The Committee recommends that, in future, agencies ensure that they report appropriately on the implementation of Government responses to Legislative Assembly committee recommendations, and make this information available on the internet.

Government Response

Agreed. The Department of Education and Training will respond to ACT Legislative Assembly committee reports, including reports where a range of agencies have responsibility for the carriage of recommendations.

Responses to ACT Legislative Assembly committee reports will be available on the Internet.

(In this regard it is noted that the government response to the August 2003 report Pathways to the Future: Report on the Inquiry into Vocational Education and Training in the ACT is available at:

<http://www.det.act.gov.au/publicat/VET/ActionItemsGovtResponseToVETInquiry.pdf>)

Recommendation 4

2.22. The Committee recommends that the Government ensure that there is a mechanism included in the Annual Reports Directions for annual reports to include qualitative and quantitative information about the work undertaken by volunteers.

Government Response

Not Agreed. Guidelines on volunteerism in the ACTPS are currently being developed, including how volunteerism should be reported across Government.

With regard to annual reports, some agencies already include summary level qualitative information on the work undertaken by volunteers in their annual reports. For example, many schools reported on measures implemented to develop quality partnerships and networks with the community through their 2003 and 2004 School Board reports (provided by calendar year). In future years School Board reports will include information regarding the type and extent of involvement of community members in a voluntary capacity in the operation of the school and in the presentation of educational programs and services.

Specific reporting and quantitative analysis is restricted by definitional issues, especially in relation to what constitutes a "volunteer" and what is "work". The distinction between volunteers and persons serving in an honorary capacity on boards and committees, and whether volunteers engaged by non-government agencies are included for reporting purposes would also require resolution. In addition significant data development work would be required including the establishment of agreed measures and an understanding of collection methodologies, before quantitative data made available by different agencies could be meaningfully interpreted.

The most comprehensive source of information on the volunteer workforce is available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The Voluntary Work Survey and the next General Social Survey (which will include a full volunteer survey) proposed for publication in January 2007, provide information on quantifying unpaid work, and recognising its social and economic value. This is the preferred approach for responding to the recommendation on quantifying unpaid voluntary work, as ACT data contributes to national reporting providing cross sectional analysis and comparative statistics.

Recommendation 5

2.26. The Committee recommends that agencies ensure that future reports include contact officers and relevant references to other reporting and information sources consistently throughout the report.

Government Response

Agreed in Principle. Including contact officers names and numbers can be problematic due to changes in staff positions and changes in organisation structure and responsibilities.

References to contact officers and references to other reporting and information sources will be consistently provided throughout future annual reports.