

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates 2013-2014**

Outcome 1 - Early Childhood Education and Child Care

Department of Education Question No. ED0099_14

Senator Lines provided in writing.

Question

Government election commitments

1. The Government's election policy document makes reference to funding for a new occasional care places/services at 45 per cent of their cost. In relation to this program:
 - a) How much funding has been allocated to this commitment, this year, and across the forward estimates?
 - b) How will services be able to access this funding? What process will be in place for the distribution of funds?
 - c) Who will make decisions about funding approval? And on what grounds?
 - d) When does this funding become available?
 - e) What is the total allocation of funding to occasional care, taking into account existing programs and the new program promised by the Government at the election – for this year, and across the forward estimates?
 - f) Which States and Territories have been approached – or have committed to – a funding agreement in relation to this proposal?
 - g) How many services and how many places will be funded through this program? Please provide details broken down for each State and Territory across the forward estimates.
 - h) Is there a limit to the number of services that will be funded through this measure?
2. Why has the Childcare in Australia report been removed from the Department's website? When will it be reinstated?
3. What are the findings of the 2013 National Workforce Census in relation to early childhood education and care? Does the Department have a copy of the report in draft or final format? When was it received and what is the latest date it will be publically released?
4. What is Government's investment over the next four years in workforce development in early childhood education and care broken down by projects?
5. How many people accessed the Department's Recognised Prior Learning initiative for early childhood educators to attain a minimum Certificate III qualification in Children's services? What qualifications were granted under this program and how many people were granted each qualification?
6. What outcomes have been achieved by the Inclusion and Professional Support Program, and the National Quality Standards Professional Learning Program? How many educators have benefited from each program and what analysis has been completed on their effectiveness?
7. What methodology is used to calculate Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate over the forward estimates?
8. Is there any evidence to support the Government's election policy statement that, for family day carers, "the fourth and fifth children generates the profit" (sic).

9. The Government's election commitment states: "We will seek the cooperation of States and Territories to pause the requirement that all staff should be qualified until the Australian children's Education Quality and Care Authority has undertaken a full review of early childhood qualifications". In relation to this commitment:
 - a) Precisely what qualifications and requirements does the 'pause' apply to?
 - b) When will the 'pause' commence?
 - c) How long will the 'pause' last?
 - d) The use of the word 'pause' implies that progress towards the current qualification standards will recommence at some time. When will this occur?
 - e) Have any State or Territories been approached about the prospect of this 'pause'?
 - f) Have any State or Territories agreed to such a 'pause'? And on what terms?
 - g) When will the review commence? When will it conclude? And what is the latest date the findings will be made public?
 - h) How is the review being funded? What other work has been put on hold, or what programs have seen funding reduced so this work can proceed?
 - i) Does the Commonwealth Minister have the ability to make unilateral changes to the Law relating to the quality of early childhood education and care, or educator qualifications? Will the agreements of one or more of the States be required?
10. The Government's election commitments include an Industry Advisory Council for the child care sector. In relation to this commitment:
 - a) Has the council been established? If not, when will the Council first convene?
 - b) How will members of the Council be selected?
 - c) How many members will the Council have?
 - d) What criteria will be used to identify the 'respected industry expert and leader'? Who is this person?
 - e) Will the Council include any early childhood educators, academics, professionals or children's advocates?
 - f) How will members of the Council be selected? Will the Minister or the Minister's office make a final decision about membership of the Council?
 - g) What is the purpose of the council?
 - h) Will members of the council be remunerated? How much and on what terms? And for how long will appointments be made?
11. The Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2013 proposes a \$7,500 p.a. cap on the child care rebate for each child between 1 July 2014 and 1 July 2017. If this proposal is implemented:
 - a) How many families, with how many children, are predicted to incur child care costs that exceed the fixed \$7,500 cap in each of the forward estimates years – including breakdowns by State and federal electorate?
 - b) If the cap on the child care rebate was indexed in the usual way (rather than being subject to a \$7,500 p.a cap) how many families, with how many children, would be predicted to incur child care costs that exceed the cap in each of the forward estimates years – including breakdowns by State and federal electorate? i.e. what predictions about indexation of the rebate cap are included in the current budget.
 - c) What is the value of the savings this measure will generate in each year of the forward estimates, compared to permitting the child care rebate to be indexed in the usual way?
12. What were the pre-school attendance rates nationally, and for each State/Territory and federal electorate in December 2007 and in September 2013? And what was the per cent change in attendance rates nationally and for each State/Territory and federal electorate in that time?
13. What correspondence has the department received from state governments and/or COAG regarding possible changes to the EYQF? When did this take place?

14. How much government funding has been spent on implementation of the EYQF to date?
15. Have funds been allocated to parent education of the EYQF? What has taken place? Are their plans for additional parent communication?

Answer

1. a) The Government's Policy for Better Child Care and Early Learning provides \$12.6 million commencing from 2014–15.
 b,c) Programme details will be announced prior to its commencement in 2014-15.
 d) As for (1a) above.
 e) Funding under this programme is in addition to funding through the Community Support Programme (CSP). In 2012-13, a total of \$4.2 million was paid to eligible occasional care services under CSP. Parents using CCB-approved occasional care services may also be eligible for Australian Government fee assistance (CCB/CCR) to meet the cost of their child care. It is not possible to provide future funding for occasional care as this includes eligibility-based assistance to families and services and is therefore dependent on factors such as future usage of eligible services.
 f) Consultations have commenced with all States and Territories.
 g,h) As for (1b,c) above.
2. Historical editions of Child Care in Australia were temporarily unavailable during development of the new Department of Education website. These are now again available.
3. Data from the national Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census is received on a progressive basis by the department. A report on the Census is expected to be published in 2014.
4. Investment in 2013-14 in early childhood workforce development is as follows:

Programme	2013-14
National Partnership Agreement on TAFE Fee Waivers for Child Care Qualifications	\$18.2m
HECS-HELP Benefit for early childhood education teachers	\$0.533m
Recognition of Prior Learning	\$1.2m
Inclusion and Professional Support Program	
• Inclusion Support Agencies	\$33.5m
• Professional Support Coordinators	\$17.3m
• Indigenous Professional Support Units	\$3.4m

Investment in workforce development will also include the new professional development programme announced on 10 December 2013.

It is not possible to set out investment over the remainder of the next four years as details of projects and take up in future years are not yet available.

5. As at 9 December 2013, 61 Recognition of Prior Learning grants have been paid through the initiative with 33 of these applicants enrolled in a Certificate III qualification.

As of 9 December 2013, the following qualifications have been granted: six educators received a Certificate III in Children's Services, four a Diploma in Children's Services and one an Advanced Diploma in Children's Services.

6. Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP):
In 2012-13 around \$51 million was spent subsidising the cost of additional educators in centre based services and as capacity payments for home based services to facilitate the inclusion of children with ongoing high support needs, including those with disability. Additionally, around \$31 million was spent on delivering practical supports to build capacity in child care and early learning services to include children with additional needs.

Almost 25 000 educators participated in 1834 professional development and training activities delivered by Professional Support Coordinators between January 2013 and June 2013. These educators came from over 5500 child care and early learning services.

An evaluation to measure the effectiveness of IPSP, and identify the extent to which the program objectives are being achieved, is scheduled for the 2014-15 financial year.

National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program:

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) has been contracted to deliver the National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program (NQS PLP).

No formal evaluation of the NQS PLP has been conducted. ECA progress reports indicate that over a third of all early childhood educators are accessing the NQS PLP online resources, there are 27410 subscribers to the NQS PLP fortnightly e-newsletter, 29 000 Facebook users and 4000 people registered on the online forum which has received over 1.6 million views.

7. The methodology used to calculate Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate over the forward estimates is a micro-simulation model based on unit record data of child care attendance models and a range of other inputs. The model's parameters, methodology and assumptions are agreed with the Department of Finance and the Treasury.
8. The department did not undertake modelling to inform pre-election policy statements. The statement is in line with Family Day Care arrangements, for example, fee revenues, Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate increase where there are additional children for whom care is provided.
9. a-f) At its meeting on 29 November 2013, the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) agreed to senior officials undertaking further work to explore transitional provisions to deal with workforce shortages, especially with early childhood teachers, and educators in rural and remote locations. The department is discussing with states and territories transitional arrangements relating to qualification requirements.
g) The review of the National Partnership on the National Quality Framework is scheduled to occur in 2014. Release of findings will be a matter for the Standing Council on Schools, Education and Early Childhood.
h) This work is occurring within existing resources in line with normal practice. No programmes have been reduced in funding to pay for this work.
i) Any changes to the NQF must be agreed by SCSEEC.
10. a-f) Arrangements for the Ministerial Advisory Council and its membership are under consideration and will be announced at a future time.

g) The Ministerial Advisory Council will provide the Government with well-informed recommendations on proposed legislation and policies based on consultation with, and direct knowledge of, the sector. It will provide increased transparency and accountability as well as accessibility to the Government's decision making process.

h) As for (a-f) above.

11. Please see evidence separately provided in connection with this Bill - Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment consideration of the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2013 refers.
12. Not available. Preschool attendance data was not produced for 2007 and attendance data for 2013 is not yet available pending the ABS release of the National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection (ABS Preschool Education Australia 2013).
13. The department received no correspondence from state governments and/or COAG regarding possible changes to the Early Years Quality Fund.
14. A total of \$25,034.87 was spent in relation to the EYQF advisory board for travel and accommodation.
15. No funds were allocated to parent education.