



Australian Government
Department of Employment
and Workplace Relations

Our Ref: EC25-003472

Secretary
Natalie James

Senator Maria Kovacic
Senator for New South Wales
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
senator.kovacic@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator

Thank you for your letter of 1 October 2025 regarding the appearance of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations at the 2025-26 Supplementary Budget Estimates hearing, Thursday 9 October 2025 before the Education and Employment Legislation Committee.

In considering my response to your letter, I have been guided by the *Government Guidelines for Official Witnesses before Parliamentary Committees and Related Matters* issued by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (the Guidelines).¹

The Guidelines address requests for information from non-government parties and members of parliament. Paragraph 8 notes that such requests are usually made to the minister, but that direct approaches to officials for routine factual information are traditional and appropriate, particularly on constituency matters. It also provides that an official may inform the minister of such a request and response. I confirm I have consulted Minister Rishworth's office about your letter and this reply in framing this response in accordance with subparagraph 8.1.2.

Subparagraph 8.1.4 of the Guidelines provides that when a request is for readily available factual information, the information should be provided. In line with this, I enclose information readily available within your requested timeframe relevant to the matters raised in your letter. Note that I have not responded to matters that are the responsibility of statutory agencies, such as the Fair Work Ombudsman or the Fair Work Commission.

¹ PM&C, *Government Guidelines for Official Witnesses before Parliamentary Committees and Related Matters* (February 2015) <<https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/government-guidelines-official-witnesses-parliamentary-committees-and-related-matters-february-2015>>.

I confirm the department has no outstanding questions on notice from the 2025-26 Budget Estimates hearings.

Departmental officials will be ready to assist the Committee by responding to Senators' questions at the hearing.

Yours sincerely

Natalie James

9 October 2025

CC: Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee Secretariat
(eec.sen@aph.gov.au)

Question 1: The number and levels of staff currently employed by DEWR and all independent agencies within the portfolio including organisational structures; any changes to these levels from 1 July 2025.

Actual classification by headcount as at 31 July 2025, for the department:

Classification	Headcount
APS1	4
APS2	34
APS3	158
APS4	438
APS5	620
APS6	1,149
EL1	1,407
EL2	516
SESBand1	108
SESBand2	24
SESBand3	4
Total Headcount	4,462

Data based on actual classification (includes acting arrangements) for all classifications except SES Band 3.

Excludes Secretary, inactive employees, casuals and public office holders.

The department's organisational structure is available at: www.dewr.gov.au/about-department/resources/organisation-chart-dewr

Question 2: A detailed breakdown of DEWR's Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and management. Please include how many staff are responsible in progressing FOIs, the average days to process FOIs, the median days to process FOIs, how many have been received, and their status-whether approved in-full, in-part, or refused.

The department processes FOI requests in accordance with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Cth) (FOI Act).

The department has met all its statutory timeframes for processing requests. The time taken to process a request depends on:

- the complexity of the request
- whether the scope needs to be clarified with the applicant
- whether third party consultation is required.

The department does not comment on the existence or progress of specific FOI requests. This protects the privacy of applicants and ensures that the department does not pre-empt decisions.

The department publishes a disclosure log which lists information released in response to FOI requests: www.dewr.gov.au/about-department/corporate-reporting/freedom-information-foi/foi-disclosure-log.

Staff responsible for FOI

As at 30 June 2025, the department's Information Law Team had 12 staff working in its FOI work stream. All staff also perform duties in other areas.

- Staff member levels range from APS3 to EL2 classification level.
- Two staff members work part time.

FOI requests 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025

Requests on hand at beginning of period		
On hand as at 1 July 2024	18	
Requests received during period		
On transfer from another agency	8	Total 193
Direct from applicants	185	
Decisions made		
Access granted in full	23	Total 146
Access granted in part	90	
Access refused	33	
-Documents do not exist: 21		
-Practical refusal: 7		
-Exempt in full: 5		
Alternative Outcomes		
Transferred to another agency	13	
Withdrawn	36	
On hand as at 1 July 2025	16	

Reviews of requests received	Number
Internal reviews	
- on hand as at 1 July 2024	1
- received	16
- finalised	17
- on hand at 1 July 2025	0
Office of the Australian Information Commissioner reviews	
- on hand as at 1 July 2024	7
- received	9
- finalised	8
- on hand at 1 July 2025	8
Appeals to the Administrative Review Tribunal	
- on hand as at 1 July 2024	3
- received	0
- finalised	2
- on hand at 1 July 2025	1

Question 3: A current list of all boards, commissions, statutory appointments within the portfolio including date of appointment and cessation. Please include any vacant positions, the reason for the vacancy, when it became vacant and for how long it is expected to be vacant.

The department reports on ministerial appointments and vacancies under Senate Order 15. The latest available information is published at:
www.dewr.gov.au/about-us/corporate-reporting/senate-order-listings/senate-order-15-departmental-and-agency-appointments-and-vacancies

Question 4: An updated full breakdown on expenses related to the repayment of the underpayment of Department staff. This includes the cost of all external providers, payroll audit, legal advice costs, internal legal advice, advice from AGS.

Question 5: A list of any meetings or contact between the Department and the Fair Work Ombudsman relating to Department staff underpayments, including any file notes, agendas, minutes or correspondence related to those meetings and the staff underpayments.

Question 6: An updated breakdown of how many people have been underpaid since the audit has stated, include a breakdown across APS levels, the average amount, and the total cost to the Department for the underpayment (including interest costs).

The underpayment of staff arising from the 2022 Determination was resolved – see our letter to Senator Cash of 24 February 2025 and evidence given to the Education and Employment Legislation Committee on 26 February 2025.

Question 7: A copy of any correspondence between the Department and representatives of the CFMEU since the 2024/25 Additional Budget Estimates.

Question 8: A copy of any correspondence between the current Minister for Employment (and her office) and representatives of the CFMEU since 13 May 2025.

Question 9: A copy of any correspondence between the former Minister for Employment (and his office) and representatives of the CFMEU since the 2024/25 Additional Budget Estimates.

Question 10: A copy of any notes or records of phone conversations between the Department and the CFMEU since the 2024/25 Additional Budget Estimates.

Question 11: A copy of any notes, or records of phone conversations, between the current Minister for Employment (and her office) and the CFMEU since 13 May 2025.

The department interacts with the Construction, Forestry and Maritime Employees Union (CFMEU) and its representatives in broad range of contexts.

Question 12: A copy of any notes, or records of phone conversations, between the Department and the former Minister for Employment (and his office) since the 2024/25 Additional Budget Estimates.

The department engaged with the former Minister and his office regularly as required.

Question 13: A list of all ministerial submissions that have been created after 26 February 2025, including the area of the Department that prepared the submission, dates submitted to both Ministers, and all Assistant Ministers, requested signature dates, actual signature dates, and whether the Minister disagreed with any recommendations, as per the table below.

The department prepares briefs within agreed timeframes on a case-by-case basis.

Question 14: A list of all meetings the Department has undertaken with external stakeholders, which were at the request of the current or former Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and/or his/her office, since the 2024/25 Additional Budget Estimates hearings.

The department regularly meets with a wide range of stakeholders as part of our business as usual and as part of specific projects.

Question 15: An up-to-date breakdown of the total number of complaints DEWR has received from employees or contracted entities, categorised by type (for example: pay and conditions, harassment, discrimination, or other relevant categories) in 2024-25.

The department does not have readily available data about complaints from employees and contracted entities across the range of the department's activities and programs.

Question 16: Total spend on the Workforce Australia program in 2024-25, broken down to number of providers by program and numbers of participants.

Contract and Service Type	Number of Providers	2025-26 PBS estimated expenditure for the 2024-25 year (\$m)
Workforce Australia Deed of Standing Offer 2022-2028 with Head Licence	41	\$1,385.590
Workforce Australia Yarrabah Deed 2022-2027	1	
Broome Employment Services 2023-2027	1	
Norfolk Island Employment Support Program 2025-2028	1	

Workforce Australia - Career Transition Assistance Deed 2022-2027	21	
Workforce Australia - Self-Employment Assistance Deed 2022-2027	21	
Workforce Australia - Employability Skills Training Deed 2022-2027	15	
Employment Facilitator Services	27	
Workforce Specialists Services and Projects 2023 with Licence	2	
Workforce Australia - Transition to Work Deed 2022-2027	37	\$326.176
Parent Pathways Deed 2024-2027	29	\$59.173

Participant numbers as at 31 July 2025

Contract and Service Type	Number of Participants
Workforce Australia Deed of Standing Offer 2022-2028 with Head Licence	699,080
Workforce Australia Yarrabah Deed 2022-2027	805
Broome Employment Services 2023-2027	915
Norfolk Island Employment Support Program 2025-2028	40
Workforce Australia - Self-Employment Assistance Deed 2022-2027	18,755
Workforce Australia - Transition to Work Deed 2022-2027	47,670
Parent Pathways Deed 2024-2027	18,705

Notes:

- Workforce Australia caseload figures include: Workforce Australia Online, Workforce Australia Services, Transition to Work, Broome Employment Services and Yarraabah Employment Services.
- In order to protect individuals' privacy, all cells within the table have been rounded to the nearest 5. This may result in non-additivity for some totals

Question 17: The number of compliance notices that have been issued under the new Workforce Australia system.

Question 18: The latest Workforce Australia caseload, how many are in each stream, how long they have been in the stream, when they first became a participant.

Question 19: A table outlining the number of long-term and very long-term jobseekers in the caseload, broken down by how many years they have been in the system.

For questions 17 to 19, this data can be found in the department's published and publicly available data at www.dewr.gov.au/employment-services-data. Links to published data include:

Question 17 - [Targeted Compliance Framework \(TCF\) – 1 April to 30 June 2025](#)

Question 18 - [Workforce Australia Caseload by selected Cohorts – 31 July 2025](#)

Question 19 - [Workforce Australia Caseload by selected Cohorts – 31 July 2025](#)

Workforce Australia does not allocate people into categories known as streams as was done under the previous employment services arrangements.

Question 20: Latest estimates or data on the VET-FEE HELP Scheme Redress payments, broken down by State, age, average amount paid to each applicant, median amount per applicant, lowest amount paid, highest amount paid, average days to progress payment of redress, median days from application for redress to payment.

From 1 January 2016 to 1 September 2025, around \$3.9 billion has been re-credited for approximately 211,000 VFH Students.

Question 21: Release an unredacted interim skills reporting schedule for the past financial year.

The Fee-Free TAFE Skills Agreement does not include states and territories' agreement to publicly release their Fee-Free TAFE quarterly reports. States and Territories have provided this data in confidence.

Question 22: Most up-to-date data on the number of in training apprentices and trainees, broken down by gender, age, state, and electorate.

Refer to the *National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) 2025, Australian vocational education and training statistics: apprentices and trainees 2025 – March quarter* (www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/apprentices-and-trainees-2025-march-quarter)

Question 23: An up-to-date breakdown of Workforce Australia participant numbers by the points target they need to achieve during each monthly period.

This data can be found in the department's published and publicly available data at: [PBAS Public Data Report – 1 April 2025 to 30 June 2025](#) (www.dewr.gov.au/employment-services-data/resources/pbas-public-data-report-1-april-2025-30-june-2025)