

Chapter 3

Education and Training portfolio

3.1 This chapter summarises certain key areas of interest raised during the committee's consideration of budget estimates for the 2019-20 financial year for the Education and Training portfolio.

3.2 On 5 April 2019, the committee heard evidence from:

- Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment (representing the Minister for Education and Training); and
- Senator the Hon. Michaelia Cash, Minister for Small Business and Family Business, Skills and Vocational Education.

3.3 The committee also heard evidence from officers from the Department of Education and Training (the department).

3.4 Due to the prorogation of the 45th Parliament on 11 April 2019, the committee did not hear evidence from the Education and Training portfolio on 11 April as was originally scheduled as a prorogation is regarded as terminating the scheduled sittings of the Senate and of estimates hearings.

Department of Education and Training

Cross Portfolio

3.5 Inquiries were made into advertising expenditures for the Quality Schools Package. Ms Susan Charles, Branch Manager, Communication Branch, noted that the contract value for the quality school campaign was over \$9.4 million.¹ Ms Charles provided a breakdown of this amount, stating:

There was a contract amount for media which was \$6,840,627. For market research, we had benchmark tracking and evaluation research of \$172,899. The creative contract was \$1,595,000. Then we had market research for developmental research at \$571,120.²

Outcome 1

3.6 The committee discussed the estimated distribution of funding to states and territories of the 2020 Extension to the National Partnership Agreement to Universal Access to Early Childhood Education. Ms Jackie Wilson, Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood and Child Care, noted that of the \$453.1 million of funding, the state-by-state breakdown was as follows:

- New South Wales—\$136.7 million;

1 *Committee Hansard*, 5 April 2019, p. 87.

2 *Committee Hansard*, 5 April 2019, p. 87.

- Victoria—\$130.9 million;
- Queensland—\$82.3 million;
- Western Australian—\$46.5 million;
- South Australia—\$28.9 million;
- Tasmania—\$9.9 million;
- Australian Capital Territory—\$9.6 million; and
- Northern Territory—\$4.7 million.³

3.7 The committee also inquired into the childcare subsidy legislation and the provisions in place to potentially waive child care fees should a centre close temporarily due to unforeseen circumstances. Ms Belinda Catelli, Branch Manager, Payment Policy and Engagement, was asked for the protocol if a child care centre was forced to close due to a gastroenteritis outbreak. Ms Catelli responded:

We have absent day provisions in place for particular events that could occur. Where the service normally wants to be open but there's a gastro outbreak, families can claim 42 days per year for absent stays, and that provides that continuity of fee relief for families.⁴

3.8 Further questions were asked about the protocol if a child care centre was closed for more than 42 days after, for example, a natural disaster such as the Townsville floods. Ms Wilson stated:

In the case of the Townsville floods, we worked with the Queensland state government. They had a mechanism for triggering exceptional circumstances, and instead of making the families try to meet two requirements we just agreed with the Queensland state government that if they met their terms they would meet our terms. We work with Centrelink to put that in force with their people up there. I think you also asked if the centre was closed for a longer period. There are mechanisms that can accommodate more than 42 days and there are provisions for us to consider that on a case-by-case basis.⁵

Outcome 2

3.9 The committee discussed the status of the Performance-Based Funding for the Commonwealth Grant Scheme. Mr Dom English, Group Manager, Higher Education, noted that the panel, chaired by Professor Paul Wellings, had issued a discussion paper inviting responses by mid-March 2019 and that 'in the order of 50 responses' were received.⁶ When further questioned on when the performance funding review

3 Department of Education and Training, *Department of Education and Training response to letter of 3 April 2019, from Senator Gavin Marshall, Deputy Chair Senate Education and Employment Committee*, p. 2 (tabled 5 April 2019).

4 *Committee Hansard*, 5 April 2019, p. 99.

5 *Committee Hansard*, 5 April 2019, p. 99.

6 *Committee Hansard*, 5 April 2019, p. 57.

would be finalised, Mr David Learmonth, Deputy Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International, responded that the final report is due on 30 June 2019 for performance based funding.⁷

3.10 The committee further discussed the cessation of the Endeavour Mobility Grants program. Ms Karen Sandercock, Group Manager, International, when questioned about the impact of this responded that the government have announced 'the new Destination Australia program which is open to international students who wish to come and study in Australia with a focus on regionally based locations'.⁸

3.11 Under the Skills and Training section of Outcome 2, the committee particularly focussed on funding allocations for the new skills package measures. When questioned on the specific breakdown of funding for the package, Ms Nadine Williams, Deputy Secretary, Skills and Training, responded:

The overall skills package is made up of that \$54.5 million... There's also an additional \$463 million that has been redirected from the Skilling Australians Fund, as well as a further \$7.8 million redirected from the Commonwealth Scholarships Program for South Australia. That is the total of the package of \$525.3 million.⁹

3.12 The committee also discussed budgeting for the establishment of the National Skills Commission. Ms Williams provided a year-by-year breakdown of the funding:

...\$48.3 million, or thereabouts, is budgeted for the National Skills Commission, and the funding for that commences in 2019-2020—that's \$12.1 million. 2020-2021 is \$12.1 million, 2021-2022 is \$11.7 million and 2022-2023 is \$12.3 million.¹⁰

Senator Slade Brockman

Chair

7 *Committee Hansard*, 5 April 2019, p. 58.

8 *Committee Hansard*, 5 April 2019, p. 63.

9 *Committee Hansard*, 5 April 2019, p. 65.

10 *Committee Hansard*, 5 April 2019, p. 67.

