

## **Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee**

### **BUDGET ESTIMATES – 3 JUNE 2015 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE**

#### **Department of Human Services**

**Topic:** ANAO Report 37 – Centrelink call wait times

**Question reference number:** HS 60

**Senator:** Cameron

**Type of question:** Written

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 24 July 2015

**Number of pages:** 4

#### **Question:**

- a) The ANAO reported that 3.3 million calls were transferred in 2013-14. When a call is transferred it is counted as another separate call and the average speed of answer calculation restarts. How many of the 3.3 million transferred calls were transferred by IIEs?
- b) In 2013-14 28.6 million calls entered the queue to speak to an operator, which is 25.3 million calls plus 3.3 million transfers. How much time could be shaved off average wait times by improving first contact resolution?
- c) What is the breakdown of first contact resolutions for permanent staff, non-ongoing staff and IIEs (casuals)?
- d) The ANAO report identifies that transfer rates drop and first contact resolutions increase for IIE as they become more experienced. Given the clear improvements in productivity why won't the department invest in the skills of IIEs and offer permanent jobs.
- e) As part of Agreement Negotiations has the department considered the productivities available by converting IIEs into permanent positions?
- f) In 2013-14 IIEs were the only group in the SMART centres that failed to meet QOL "correctness targets". Does the department provide the same access to training and development for IIEs as it does for permanent staff?
- g) Does failure to meet "correctness targets" create rework for the department?
- h) How much rework is created by only achieving 93% correctness rather than the KPI of 95%?
- i) The ANAO paints a clear picture of a department struggling to meet ongoing and regular demand for its service. Given the department is struggling to meet regular and ongoing demand how does the department justify employing IIEs who should only be employed to deal with work that is by its nature irregular and intermittent?
- j) What is the staffing profile of the estimated 1,000 staff needed to reduce call wait times to 5 minutes (ANAO Report 37 page 21)?

- k) i) Who ordered staff to answer the phones following the release of the ANAO Report 37 on 19 May 2015?
- ii) Which dates did the directive cover?
- iii) How many staff were involved?
- iv) Provide the daily average call wait times for 1 May 2015 to 3 June 2015.
- v) What other actions did the department take to address call wait times following the release of the ANAO report?
- l) How many staff are involved in implementing the ANAO Report 37 recommendations? Please list by level and section.

**Answer:**

- a) Of the 3.3 million transferred calls in 2013-14, 1.2 million were initiated by irregular and intermittent employees (IIEs).
- b) The Australian National Audit Office used transferred calls as a proxy for first contact resolution in its Centrelink telephony audit. The department does not agree with this definition as a call that is *not* transferred will not be resolved at first point of contact if the customer has to call back later to complete the transaction. Consequently, it may be more efficient for the customer to have been transferred at the time of the first call. Further, the assertion that wait times will improve with higher rates of first contact resolution relies on the assumption that a lower rate of transferred calls leads to lower customer contact time, which would have to be tested.
- c) The department does not have access to this information.
- d) The department will look at further ongoing recruitment in the Service Delivery Operations Group in the new financial year.
- e) The department encourages IIEs to apply for ongoing positions in the department as positions become available. As this is the department's existing practice, the department has not otherwise considered converting IIEs into ongoing positions as part of the enterprise agreement negotiation process.
- f) IIEs receive 1-2 weeks full-time training prior to commencing shifts with the department. All staff, including IIEs, also receive modularised training depending on the skill sets required as well as ongoing relevant training and coaching.
- g) Yes. Correctness targets are monitored through the department's quality checking procedures and errors are returned to the actioning service officer for correction. This process allows the staff member to improve their proficiency leading to a reduction in errors over time.
- h) In 2013-14, a 93 per cent correctness rate resulted in 23,818 errors being returned for correction. A 95 per cent correctness rate would have resulted in 17,013 errors being returned for correction.
- i) See answer to (d) above. The department uses intermittent / irregular employees when appropriate to meet peak demands in workload.
- j) The staffing profile of the estimated 1,000 staff required to reduce call wait times to five minutes is primarily comprised of APS4 level staff (85 per cent) with the balance made up of APS5 (4 per cent), APS6 (6 per cent) and EL1 level staff (4 per cent). This is in line with the staff profile of the relevant areas.

- k) i) Following the release of ANAO Report 37 call demand was managed as normally would be expected in a busy week using real time management. In anticipation of an expected increase in calls following the release of the report, a decision was made to divert non-telephony staff to answering phones. This decision was made at General Manager Level.
- ii) Due to the lower than expected number of calls, staff were gradually moved back to other work in the afternoon of 21 May 2015. This is in line with the smart centre concept which manages telephony and processing services to allow work to be moved efficiently between teams based on demand.
- iii) As processing staff are not currently scheduled it is not possible to identify how many staff were redeployed to telephony on those dates and to do so would involve an unreasonable diversion of resources.
- iv) The daily average call wait times for the period 1 May 2015 to 3 June 2015 are provided in the following table.

Date	Average call wait times
1/05/2015	14:33
4/05/2015	17:30
5/05/2015	13:58
6/05/2015	15:52
7/05/2015	13:46
8/05/2015	14:08
11/05/2015	21:06
12/05/2015	13:56
13/05/2015	13:03
14/05/2015	10:06
15/05/2015	11:03
18/05/2015	21:10
19/05/2015	18:12
20/05/2015	18:09
21/05/2015	3:50
22/05/2015	6:41
25/05/2015	21:40
26/05/2015	18:10
27/05/2015	16:12
28/05/2015	11:52
29/05/2015	15:30
1/06/2015	19:18
2/06/2015	14:52
3/06/2015	13:39

- v) The department continues to undertake real time management to deploy staff to manage demand.
- l) The following numbers of staff are involved in implementing the ANAO Report 37 recommendations:

#### Recommendation No.1

The department commenced work to document a coordinated channel strategy prior to the release of the ANAO's recommendation. The current staffing attributed to documenting the channel strategy in the Change Coordination and Operations Design Branch is:

- two Executive Level 2 officers;
- one Executive Level 1 officer on a part-time basis; and
- one APS6 level officer on a part-time basis.

#### Recommendation No.2

The department had commenced work on a project to implement a departmental Quality Call Listening Framework prior to the ANAO Audit and the release of the recommendations. Part of this project will address the ANAO's recommendation number 2. It is not possible to apportion the staff effort directly attributable to addressing this recommendation, however current staffing attributed to the project overall in the Quality and Performance Improvement Branch is:

- one Executive Level 2 officer on a part-time basis;
- one Executive Level 1 officer; and
- four APS6 level officers (average over the last three months of the project).

#### Recommendation No.3

Staff will be allocated to address this recommendation after the channel strategy report has been received and considered.