

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

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

Outcome 1 - Early Childhood, Working Age and Indigenous Participation

DEEWR Question No. EW0057_14

Senator Boyce provided in writing.

Question

ACECQA study into national quality controls

According to a recent study of 1620 childcare services by the Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) almost half (44%) of Australia's childcare centres have failed to meet national quality controls - including kids' health and safety standards and the sub-standard centres will not be given a deadline to come up to scratch. • It has found one in four childcare providers nationally does not meet the national standard for children's health and safety. • One in three is below the standard for "educational program and practice" or for "physical environment". • And at least one in 10 does not meet the minimum staffing requirements, while one in six is below-standard for "relationships with children". 1. The Government has trumpeted its national childcare reform package but do the ACECQA results suggest have those reforms been too extensive and rushed to enable good childcare centres the time and capacity to deal with them? 2. I am led to believe that the expected staff qualifications and current pay rates do not match which means it is difficult to attract the staff required to meet the demands of the new national standards. What planning or arrangements are in place to assist the industry to find/train the staff required by the reforms? 3. What exactly are the mandatory timetables for the introduction of the reforms and should or can they be extended given the issues facing the industry flowing from the demands of the reforms? 4. In regard to the architecture of the Government child care reforms what advice or expertise was sought from the industry to make sure the industry could with the breadth and demands of the reform package and its timetable?

Answer

1. The National Quality Standard sets a new national benchmark for the quality of education and care services against which Regulatory Authorities in each state and territory assess and rating services.

A rating of 'Working Towards National Quality Standard' does not mean the service has dropped its performance or suggest that children's health and safety is compromised. It is an important part of the successful transition to new and more challenging quality standards, and reflects that a service is continuing to improve its quality.

2. The Australian Government believes the sector is on track to meet the qualification requirements under the National Quality Framework which require all staff to hold or 'be working towards' a qualification.

A number of transitional arrangements are also in place, including:

- defining persons taken to hold an approved early childhood teaching qualification
- recognising those 'actively working towards an early childhood teaching qualification' as taken to be early childhood teachers until 1 January 2016.

The Australian Government has also introduced a number of initiatives that support educators to upskill or obtain a qualification, and boost numbers of qualified educators in the sector, including:

- the removal of TAFE fees for diploma and advanced diploma child care courses to support an expected 8000 people per year to gain Diploma and Advanced Diploma level qualifications in early childhood.
- early childhood education teachers HECS-HELP scheme, which reduces the HELP debt of early childhood teachers who choose to work in rural and remote areas, Indigenous communities and areas of high disadvantage.
- funding for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) assessment grants to assist eligible early childhood educators in regional and remote locations to undertake an RPL assessment for Certificate III, Diploma and Advanced Diploma in Children's Services
- investing up to \$10 million from the National Workforce Development Fund in early childhood workforce training, creating up to 2000 extra training places.

The Australian Government also developed an Early Years Workforce Strategy in collaboration with the states and territories which is aimed at improving the supply and quality of early childhood workers.

3. The National Quality Framework commenced on 1 January 2012. In addition to the creation of the national system, including a new National Quality Standard, an assessment and rating process and new national body, staff to child ratios for 0 to 24 months age group came into operation.

On 1 January 2014, changes to educator qualifications and staff to child ratios for family day care educators will commence.

On 1 January 2016, changes to staff to child ratios for 25-35 months and 36 months to school age groups will commence.

4. Comprehensive consultation with the sector and peak organisations occurred from 2008 to 2011 to allow services time to understand and prepare for the new requirements under the National Quality Framework.