

**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. EW0242_14

Senator Back asked on 6 June 2013, Hansard page 27

Question

Universal Access - attendance and access figures for early education

Senator BACK: Following on from that, the universal access strategy in the national partnership agreement in early childhood education and the Labor government's 2007 election platform document headed 'Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011–2018' all define access as 15 hours per week, 40 weeks a year. If you cannot answer the first question, the question is: why did the department not use this figure in favour of the one hour per week figure? Ms Paul: I am not sure that the one hour per week is considered adequate. It may be part of a definition of enrolment. We would not have used it for saying that was adequate access to early education. My guess—and, obviously, I will take it on notice—is that it is about enrolment status. The 15 hours per week equals 600 hours over a year, and that was set many years ago when that national partnership on universal access was first developed. That was based on research about what was needed and appropriate. That equals about three hours a day for a preschooler—it is that sort of basis. A couple of jurisdictions had reached that but many had not at the time. Certainly, there has never been a lower standard for Indigenous—clearly, there would not be. So it will be about slightly different things. Senator BACK: Would you be good enough to provide attendance and access figures measured against that latter criterion of 600 hours per year, or 15 hours per week? Ms Paul: Yes.

Answer

The Universal Access commitment is that every child will have access to a preschool program in the year before full-time schooling. The preschool program is to be delivered in accordance with a national Early Years Learning Framework for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year.

The national proxy measure of Universal Access to early childhood education is that 95 per cent of children in the year before full-time schooling are enrolled. This benchmark recognises that participation in early childhood education in Australia is voluntary.

A child is taken to be attending if the child is enrolled in a preschool program and has attended the program for at least 1 hour during the reference period. This is a nationally agreed standard stated in Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Early Child Education and Care National Minimum Data Set specifications which set out the data standards for the National Collection.

The ABS publication *Preschool Education, Australia 2012* indicates that the enrolment rate for all children nationally is at 89 per cent with 56 per cent enrolled for 15 hours a week or more.

Jurisdictions remain committed to the achievement of Universal Access in 2013. The data for 2013 will be available in 2014.