

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Budget Estimates 2015 - 2016

Outcome 1 - Employment

Department of Employment Question No. EMSQ15-000095

Senator Lines asked on 01 June 2015 on proof Hansard page 93

Question

Terms of Reference

Mr Parsons: Yes, it is independent research and evaluation. The department is working with them to provide data for the academics to interpret.

Senator LINES: Are the terms of reference for that evaluation available to Senate estimates?

Ms Mitchell: They are not published.

Senator LINES: Are they available to the committee?

Mr Hehir: I would need to take that on notice.

Senator LINES: Okay. Do the terms of reference include a value-for-money term of reference?

Continues pg 94...

Mr Hehir: Sorry, Senator; do you mind if I take the whole set on notice? If there are other things around what the actual terms of reference are, or what is in and what is not in, can I take that on notice?

Senator LINES: I guess the problem with that is, if you come back to me and say that I cannot have the terms of reference, then I have lost an opportunity to explore with you what they might contain without you prejudicing your answer. So I am happy for you to take on notice whether you can supply the committee with the terms of reference, but I would like you to answer the question: will the terms of reference include a value-for-money component?

Mr Hehir: I do not know if they do include a value-for-money component. I would need to check the terms of reference.

Senator LINES: It seems Ms Mitchell knows.

Ms Mitchell: The evaluation will measure in part the take-up of places as measured by referral and commencement rates and the quality of activities—for example, whether activities suit participants' interests, help them acquire new skills, are appropriately supervised and whether participants value their experience.

Ms Leon: But I think the question of value for money really is a second-order question that might derive from seeing whether the program has been effective in meeting the objectives of the program. I think that is not really a—

Senator LINES: So it is not a term of reference?

Ms Leon: I just think the nature of the question is one that is not readily amenable to evaluation, because it requires you to ascribe some particular belief systems other than 'What are the objectives of the program?' in order to determine what is value for money. So we will be measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of the program—

Senator LINES: Yes, as Ms Mitchell has just outlined.

Ms Leon: That is right.

Senator LINES: Will one of the measures of the effectiveness of the program be employment beyond six months?

Ms Leon: As I said, we have not got the terms of reference here with us, and Mr Hehir has indicated that we are going to take on notice whether we can provide you with the terms of reference. So I think in a broad—

Senator LINES: Did you hear my response to Mr Hehir?

Ms Leon: Yes—that you would rather we did not. But we are.

Senator LINES: No, no. I am perfectly fine for you to take on notice the question of whether the terms of reference can be made available to the Senate inquiry. What I would like to do now is explore what might be in the terms of reference. So what I am asking is: will the evaluation explore employment outcomes beyond six months?

Answer

The independent evaluation focused on two overarching evaluation objectives. Specifically:

1. What can be learnt from the implementation of the phase-in that can help improve the programme for the remainder of the 2014-15 and for the full implementation of the scheme?
2. How have the employability outcomes of participants been affected by participation in the programme?

The independent evaluation also asked four specific evaluation questions:

1. What if any impact has the Work for the Dole 2014–15 had on the referral of job seekers to work for the dole or other activities and their commencement in those activities?
2. Has the supply of activities under Work for the Dole 2014–15 been sufficient to meet demand?
3. Has Work for the Dole 2014–15 provided suitable work-like experiences for eligible job seekers?
4. Is Work for the Dole 2014–15 associated with improved employability?