

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

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates 2011-2012**

Outcome 1 - Early Childhood Education and Child Care

DEEWR Question No. EW1006_12

Senator Nash provided in writing.

Question

'Staff hard to come by as childcare centres struggle with reforms'

"Refer to SMH story 'Staff hard to come by as childcare centres struggle with reforms'. It specifically refers to a regional centre from Orange in central west NSW at risk of losing accreditation after a fruitless two year search to fill a single vacancy for a university qualified teacher and carer. According to a national survey by Childcare Alliance Australia, two-thirds of private operators could not find the qualified staff they need to meet the gov't's new industry rules. The survey also showed almost 70pc of centre providers advertised for staff and 67.4pc said the position remains unfilled. Qld and NSW operators experienced the most difficulty. • Is the gov't/dept aware of these difficulties in finding qualified staff especially in regional areas? • How long has it been aware of this issue? • Why did the gov't still push ahead with the carer to child ratio to be in place by 1 January given these difficulties? • Will it waive penalties/deregistration for those childcare operators who genuinely cannot find the staff? <http://www.smh.com.au/national/education/staff-hard-to-come-by-as-childcare-centres-struggle-with-reforms-20120115-1q1ai.html>"

Answer

There has been no change to the current educator to child ratio or educator qualification requirements for this service as a result of the implementation of the National Quality Framework (NQF) on 1 January 2012.

Changes to educator to child ratios and educator qualification requirements are being introduced gradually to allow services and families time to adjust and avoid sudden increases in costs. The first change, which took effect on 1 January 2012, requires services coming under the NQF across Australia to have one educator for every four children aged birth to 24 months. NSW licensing provisions, which operated in that State prior to the implementation of the NQF, already included this requirement. Changes to ratios for older children do not take effect until 1 January 2016.

The NQF requirement for an early childhood teacher to be in attendance at a service does not take effect until 1 January 2014. Former NSW licensing provisions have, since 2004, also required the engagement of an early childhood teacher in any service with 30 or more children in attendance.

Under the NQF, state and territory Regulatory Authorities may grant services a temporary waiver in respect of the requirement to have an early childhood teacher in attendance at a service. In determining whether to grant a temporary waiver,

Regulatory Authorities will also consider the guiding principles of the NQF, which include that the rights and best interests of the child are paramount.

The Australian Government has also put in place a number of initiatives to assist with increasing the number of qualified staff in this sector. These include:

- HECS-HELP initiatives for early childhood education teachers which aims to encourage early childhood teachers to work in locations of high need, including regional and remote areas, Indigenous communities and area of high disadvantage as defined by postcode;
- TAFE Fee Waivers which aims to increase the supply of qualified early childhood educators by removing regulated course fees for Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas in Children's Services delivered by TAFE institutes or other government providers; and
- Recognition of Prior Learning initiative for early childhood educators which aims to improve the quality and uptake of RPL assessments.