

Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace Relations

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

Cross Portfolio

DEEWR Question No.EW0235_12

Senator Back asked on 30/05/2011, Hansard page 14.

Question

Late Questions on Notice

Senator BACK: Minister, can I refer you to the *Hansard* of 12 May, when the deputy chair of the Senate Committee used standing order 74(5) to pursue the answers to a number of questions that were placed on notice at Senate estimates in February, because on 12 May there were 159 questions that were still unanswered. The deadline, in fact, was 8 April, at which time 209 questions were unanswered—57 per cent of the questions asked. There were a number of portfolios. Were these questions with the department at that time, 12 May, waiting to be answered or were they with you and other ministers?

Senator Chris Evans: I will get the department to answer; as you might be aware, I would not have that information personally. You are after questions on notice from the last estimates round?

Senator BACK: From additional estimates in February, yes.

Senator Chris Evans: Yes.

Senator BACK: Just to recap, at 8 April, which was the deadline for answers, 209 questions were unanswered. When I raised this in the Senate chamber on 12 May, there was still 159 unanswered.

Ms Paul: I might start the ball rolling and Mr Manthorpe can fill in. We may not have with us precisely where they were. I will note that, overall, in our own defence, we have got 100 per cent of them in earlier than usual.

Senator BACK: Is 'usual' the required cut-off date?

Senator ABETZ: That is not the KPI?

Ms Paul: That may not be the KPI but historically, given how many questions this department and its agencies receive—probably 400 or 500 at a time—I would posit that getting them all in is good. However, it is always better to meet the deadline and we did not, as you say, although mostly we come in within a few weeks of that. Perhaps Mr Manthorpe can expand on that. I do not think we have with us where they were. We would have to take that on notice.

Mr Manthorpe: No, we do not.

Senator BACK: Perhaps if I could recap. It has gone up and down in terms of performance. In the additional estimates in 2010, February, 24 per cent remained unanswered at the required date; then, for the budget this time last year, in fact, 88 per cent of questions were not answered by the required time. Fortunately, that improved; for the supplementary budget period in October last year, it was 45 per cent and, as I mentioned, it was 57 per cent. If you could take that on notice and which ministers they were still with, I would be most appreciative.

Answer

As at 12 May 2011 there were 221 answers to Questions on Notice tabled of the 369 questions which had been taken on notice. This represented 60% of the total from the Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee.