Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Finance and Administration Portfolio

Department of Human Services and agencies

Additional Estimates 2005-2006, 14 February 2006

Question: HS16

Outcome 1, Output 1.1

Topic: Centrelink – Personal Advisers

Written Question on Notice:

SENATOR SIEWERT asked on 14/2/2006:

1. In relation to the rationalisation of Centrelink Personal Advisor services, can you confirm that 31 PAs in 2005-06 and 65 PAs in 2006-07 will be reallocated to undertake an 'engagement role' in support of the new Welfare to Work package resulting in a 'saving' of $18.54 million.

2. Can you clarify how the role of the Personal Advisors will be changing to meet the 'increased demand' expected under Welfare to Work? In particular:

   a) What is the expected change in the caseload of these PAs?

   b) How many more clients per day or per week are they expected to handle?

   c) Has there been an assessment of the implications of this increasing demand on the likely effectiveness of their engagement activities and their effective success rate?

3. Have you taken into account the fact that many of those who will be new clients (including single mothers, people with a disability who are able to work part-time, and mature aged people) will in fact be more demanding – with on average less skills, education and training and more time out of the workforce?

4. Are you or will you be monitoring and reporting specifically how many staff (including those who were formerly Personal Advisors as well as those being shifted from income support roles to more demanding engagement and participation roles) leave your employment as a result of unhappiness over changing roles and policy directions?

5. You mentioned that the skills of staff currently in Personal Advisor roles would be transferred to those working as participation advisors. Can you clarify how this transfer will take place? In particular, are the PAs expected to take on a training role in addition to a new (increased) case load – and if so, do they have the training skills to do so?

6. What is the training schedule for those you mention who are currently in income support roles and will now be taking on engagement and participation roles? How does this training schedule compare to that for Personal Advisors in terms of length and intensity (which was reportedly significant) and also in terms of the skills imparted and the skill level required from the trainers?

7. Does this take into account the elevated need for support expected from those new clients (single mothers, partial disabled, mature age)?

Answer:

1. In relation to the rationalisation of Centrelink Personal Adviser services, 31 Personal Advisers in 2005-06 and 65 Personal Advisers in 2006-07 will be reallocated to assist with the increased workload arising from participation matters in support of the new Welfare to Work package. This has resulted in an adjustment to Centrelink's revenue of $18.54 million over four years for this function.

2. To deliver Welfare to Work, customer facing employees (Customer Service Officers and Personal Advisers) will be required to engage customers to assist them to move from welfare to work. The role of the Personal Adviser will be enhanced to include income support related skills. The role of the Customer Service Officer will be enhanced to include engagement and participation related skills. The new role of Customer Service Adviser is a combination of both of these roles.

   a) Customer Service Advisers will provide comprehensive participation and income support services to customers. Their role will consist of predominately face to face contact across the day and taking a proactive approach in ensuring customers not connected to appropriate services are reconnected quickly.

   b) The number of customers that Customer Service Advisers will be expected to handle in a day or week will be determined by the need to connect working age participation customers, where appropriate, to employment service providers or alternative pathways to employment.

   c) The implications of the increasing demand and effectiveness of connecting customers to employment service providers or other appropriate pathways to employment has been considered in the job redesign process.

3. Yes.

4. Centrelink's Staff Exit Questionnaire collects data regarding the experiences of staff leaving the organisation. This information informs the development of human resource policies and strategies.

5. Training has been developed for Working Age Participation employees in regard to engagement and participation. This program has been developed to create an awareness of the skills that will be required by employees to effectively deliver Welfare to Work.

It is not expected that Personal Advisers will take on a training role in addition to their current work.

6. The initial Personal Adviser training was more intensive as it covered engagement and participation and included induction, new systems and processes. This is not required for Welfare to Work training as employees have already received training or have the skills and knowledge in these areas. The engagement and participation learning program is a 21 hour facilitated package consisting of eight modules. In addition to this, policy and process training will also be delivered to Customer Service Advisers and other employees as required.

   A range of facilitators have been chosen to deliver the package. These facilitators include Centrelink psychologists, social workers, personal advisers and experienced trainers.

7. Yes

This answer required 5 hours, 30 minutes at a cost of $241.00 to prepare.