

Monday, February 5, 2024 | Today's Paper | Mind Games

# Coalition accuses Labor of misleading parliament on 123,000 childcare enrolments

**EXCLUSIVE**

By SARAH ISON

POLITICAL REPORTER

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The Coalition is accusing Labor of misleading Australians and parliament over the number of [future childcare workers](#) in the nation's training pipeline, arguing it has taken credit for enrolments made under the previous Coalition government.

Labor in October said it had made significant strides in [bolstering the early childhood education](#) and care sector, announcing in multiple media releases that "Australia's early childhood education and care sector has grown by more than 14,000 workers since May 2022, with a further 123,000 [additional educators](#) and teachers in the training pipeline".

The data was echoed in parliament by Early Childhood Education Minister Anne Aly, who said: “I’m pleased to inform the house that since the Albanese Labor government came to office, there are over 14,000 new educators in the sector and 123,000 in training pathways, in no small part due to the efforts of this government through fee-free TAFE”.

Her comments came after [Jobs and Skills Australia found](#) the nation needed 11,700 extra childcare workers within five years and 31,000 over the decade.

According to materials obtained under Freedom of Information laws, the government was advised by the Department of Education that the claim that 123,000 enrolments had taken place since the election was false.

“The aggregate figure of approximately 120,000 enrolments is derived from 2022 data for VET and 2021 data for Higher Education.

“Framing this aggregate figure as ‘Since May 2022’ is not accurate,” an email from the department stated.

Previous draft media releases obtained under FOI also showed the sentence stating “the latest enrolment statistics from 2021 and 2022 showed almost 123,000 educators are also in the pipeline” had been reworded to remove reference to 2021.

Labor has stood by its official media releases, which it said did not allege all 123,000 extra educators had enrolled since May 2022.

When presented with Ms Aly’s statement to parliament and asked why Labor had dropped references to 2021 from its media releases, a government spokeswoman said: “As of 7 October, 2023, Australia’s early childhood education and care sector has grown by more than 14,000 workers since

May 2022, with a further 123,000 additional educators and teachers in the training pipeline”.

Liberal deputy leader Sussan Ley said Labor had been “caught out” taking credit for a childcare workforce pipeline that the Coalition was partially responsible for building.

Ms Ley accused ministers of “deliberately ignoring departmental advice which warned against making this false claim”.

She added that cabinet ministers Jason Clare and Brendan O’Connor – who distributed media releases with the figures – had misled the Australian people.

Ms Ley said Ms Aly and Agriculture Minister Murray Watt – who had answered questions for the minister in the Senate over the matter – had “misled the parliament ... All four should immediately apologise and correct the record.”

Ms Aly’s office blamed her misleading statement on Hansard not including a dash that should have separated out the \$123,000 figure.

Her spokeswoman said the incorrect grammar in Hansard gave Ms Aly’s statement another meaning that she had not intended to convey.

### **SARAH ISON, POLITICAL REPORTER**

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