



Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee

Inquiry into the current capability of the APS

Answer to Question on Notice

Reference: SQ21-000103

Workforce composition

Hearing: 26 July 2021

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Question: NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission Workforce Composition

CHAIR: There was some evidence from the union earlier this morning, and then from some of the organisations that represent the Australians who receive services from the agency, that really went to two propositions—one was about the impermanence of the labour hire arrangements and the impact that has upon workers and their families' sense of security and their capacity to get a mortgage and live a normal life. For that group of 1,500 or so, those are very significant issues. The second set of issues went to capability issues and training and skills. There were some pretty persuasive submissions about those issues. I tend to see that, if workers are on a trajectory through from working in labour hire to then working directly for the APS, it does mitigate that concern. It also points, I suppose, to the sort of commitment that people have got out there, that they want to work directly for the agency, to provide that service to people. The commission's functions obviously are quite different to the agency's. Is it true that a third of the workforce of the commission are labour hire employees?

Ms Taylor: It is true to say that our work is quite different to the agency's, absolutely. I would make the point that we are completely separate entities, although joined in our responsibilities under the NDIS Act. We're also a much smaller agency, with at the moment around 500 employees, who are a mix of ASL as well as labour hire and other contractors that assist us with various functions. The majority of our workforce is ASL, apart from some labour hire arrangements we have in place for a short period of time during this financial year to assist us with some surge capability. We did have a budget uplift that came through in the last budget, only two years after our commencement, which increased our headcount by around 100 employees. We've been successful in onboarding the vast majority of those roles. That's enabled us to stabilise our workforce considerably over the labour arrangements that we had in place in our first couple of years of operation.

Another point of difference, apart from the obvious scale, is that the commission commenced incrementally. We established a national office, with the Department of Social Services' assistance, to start our arrangements for regulation of NDIS supports and services in New South Wales and South Australia in July '18. We moved into a further five jurisdictions in July '19, and we then recruited staff into Western Australia as the final jurisdiction to commence in July '20.

But that start didn't occur until December '20. So it's been a fluctuating position to establish the organisation, but our priority has been to onboard our ongoing workforce and augment that with skills through labour hire and contractor mixes to work within what we've been given. It is true that we have a surge workforce, but we've worked very hard over the last several months to onboard our ongoing workforce. With our current arrangements, we have well over 90 per cent of the ASL headcount in place.

CHAIR: So that work has resulted in a shift from 33 per cent to 10 per cent. Is that—

Ms Taylor: From 33 per cent to around 15 to 18 per cent. But we can give you further information on the adjustments, because the organisation has been establishing.

To be frank, the reason that we welcomed, of course, the budget decision to uplift the organisation's resourcing by over \$90 million over the forward estimates was in recognition of the significant volumes that the commission was receiving in our complaints function and our registration function as well as our incident oversight function. Those volumes did not occur at the point that the budget was given. The budget was in response to the fact that those volumes existed. So there was opportunity for us to supplement our workforce with additional labour hire to address those issues that we were facing but then to give us the space to have an orderly approach to onboarding our additional staff.

Answer:

As at 30 June 2021, the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission's (NDIS Commission) APS employee headcount was 332, working towards the ASL cap of 350. This achieves a total of over 90 per cent of our allocated APS staff. The NDIS Commission's total labour hire was 166, bringing the combined headcount to 498 (plus external contractors, who provide extra capacity and capability in some areas). Of the 166 labour hire, approximately half are attributed to a short-term activity surge. The NDIS Commission's long-term labour hire level will vary depending on the allocated budget and required skills at any given time, but is expected to be typically slightly under half the current total.

Prior to Government's investment in the NDIS Commission in Budget 2020, the NDIS Commission's workforce comprised approximately 33.7 per cent labour hire. The shift in workforce composition since Budget 2020 is attributable to the engagement of additional APS employees by volume recruitment.