

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment - Education

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates 2014-2015**

Outcome 1 - Early Childhood Education and Care

Department of Education Question No. ED0564_15

Senator O'Neill provided in writing.

Question

Universal Access National Partnership

In relation to the Universal Access National Partnership and early childhood education:

- a) When will the report into the review of the National Partnership be released? Can a copy be provided? Did the Education Council [see attached PDF] resolved in August that said it should be released ASAP?
- b) What are the conditions - new and/or continuing - attached to the extension of Universal Access funding for the 2015 school year? In particular, in relation to Universal Access funding being provided for preschool programs in long day care centres, how will this work in practice?
- c) Is there the potential for double dipping by LDCs — overlap of child care support and UA funding. Was this issue raised by the Productivity Commission draft report? Hasn't the Government said it will not pre-empting the Productivity Commissions findings?
- d) How are individual states and territories currently using the UA funding? What are the set outcomes for each jurisdiction? How will jurisdictions use this funding and what will the set outcomes be for each jurisdiction in 2015?
- e) Have any jurisdictions been offered less funding by the Commonwealth for 2015 than they received in 2014 under the National Partnership on universal access? If so, which jurisdictions have been offered less than they received in 2014? And by how much?
- f) Have the funding offers to the states and territories that currently do not extend the Universal Access funding to long day care services been increased from 2014 levels to reflect the broadening of the program?
- g) Page 76 of the transcript says: Senator LINES: Referring to the 5 September media release, the government announced that new rules were on the way for state and territory governments to fund preschools. What are these new rules and has every state and territory government agreed to these rules? Ms Wilson (from department): When the minister made the announcement and the press release, she actually spoke to all state and territory ministers before she made that announcement. She said it is an extension of the current arrangements. You would recall we talked about a review into UA at previous estimates and one of things the review found was that not all states and territories were distributing funding to all preschool children. Some of them were just distributing funding to their community based preschools, not to their long day-care. There was a mix across different states of approaches to their distribution. One of the things that the minister wants to make sure of is that all preschool children in a state are benefiting from the additional funding, so that is something that is new. Until we did the review, we did not realise what the variability in the distribution was.

Can the Department confirm that the Minister had spoken to all state and territory ministers prior to issuing a media release on the morning of 5 September? If not, can the Department advise which state and territory ministers the Minister had spoken to about the extension to the Universal Access funding agreement, and which she had not spoken to. With respect to any jurisdictions that had not been advised prior to the issuing of the media release, can the Department advise when the Minister spoke to those state and territory ministers to advise them of her announcement?

Answer

- a) On 15 August 2014 the Education Council agreed that the Review Report would be published; it will be available shortly on the Education Council's website at: www.scseec.edu.au.
- b) The purpose of the National Partnership has not changed – to provide universal access to quality early childhood education programmes for all children enrolled in the year before full-time school for 600 hours per year. Funding is to be provided to support all children's preschool participation, regardless of whether the programme is delivered through schools (government and non-government), standalone preschools or long day care centres. This broad, non-specific service type approach was identified in the original National Partnership in 2008 and has been consistently delivered by a number of jurisdictions.
- c) The Department provides guidance to child care services offering a preschool/kindergarten program via a Child Care Management System Fact Sheet on 'Fee Subsidies' (<http://www.education.gov.au/child-care-management-system-fact-sheets>). It states that:
Under family assistance law, eligibility for Child Care Benefit (CCB) (and subsequently Child Care Rebate) belongs to families, not to child care services. If a family has a liability to pay the fee and are assessed as eligible for CCB, they are entitled to receive payments to reduce their child care fees. When a family is also receiving a state fee subsidy, it is important to report the correct total fee for CCB purposes. The total fee reported should be the discounted fee after the subsidy has been applied.
- d) Each state and territory has developed an implementation plan that shows how universal access funding will be spent. These plans can be found at: www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/education.aspx. The expected outcomes for jurisdictions under the extended National Partnership remain the same.
- e) The Government committed a further \$406 million for the continuation of universal access funding, the same level of funding that was provided for 2013-14 in the current National Partnership.
- f) No - (see (b) and (e) above). Funding and requirements of the extension remain consistent with the current National Partnership.
- g) The Department understands the Assistant Minister made contact with state and territory Ministers before the announcement. After the announcement, departmental officers followed up with the relevant officials in each jurisdiction.