

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Supplementary Budget Estimates 2014-2015

Cross Portfolio

Department of Employment Question No. EM1582_15

Senator McKenzie asked on 23 October 2014 on proof Hansard page 11

Question

Questions on Notice

CHAIR: Let us keep this collaborative work ethic going throughout the day. I have a couple of questions. Minister and departmental secretary, congratulations on your QON record and thank you for reporting it. How does that compare to the five years previous?

Senator CAMERON: The collaboration just collapsed.

CHAIR: I have the call.

Ms Leon: It is a long table, Chair. I can table it if you wish.

CHAIR: What is the take-home message?

Senator Abetz: I can say that since I became minister and I can say that since Ms Leon became secretary, or I can say that since both of us came to the task, for supplementary budget estimates 2013–14 it is 100 per cent, for additional estimates 2013–14 it is 99.5 per cent and for the 2014–15 budget 100 per cent were tabled by the due date. We then go through the five previous years to which you refer. The highest achieved was 76 per cent in additional estimates in 2009–10.

CHAIR: Maybe we could just table that.

Senator Abetz: The worst was 2010–11, where zero were tabled by the due date.

CHAIR: Zero! That is quite a large discrepancy. There is quite a significant difference, given that, I am assuming, we have not completely turned over an entire department or workforce. Was it more that the department struggled under the weight of the numbers of questions on notice or was it the technical aspects of the questions on notice? Why is there such a large difference?

Senator Abetz: A manic minister.

Ms Leon: I was not the secretary of the department then, Chair.

Senator CAMERON: I do not think you should reflect on a minister like that, Senator Abetz.

Senator Abetz: Let me be quite open here. As a senator, especially in certain other areas, I was constantly frustrated with not getting answers back on time or the answers being deliberately dropped on the day after estimates. Senator Conroy was the expert at doing that. When I became minister, I sought to ensure that, as far as was possible, the department and the agencies would provide answers. I confess that I have personally driven that and asked my office to do that. The department and agencies have been exceptionally cooperative.

CHAIR: And the results speak for themselves. Is there any data on when the department provided the answers to the previous minister?

Ms Leon: I do not have that with me.

CHAIR: Could you take that on notice, please? Senator Abetz: We will take it on notice, but I am just reflecting whether we can and should reach back into another minister's administration of the portfolio. So we will take it on notice.

Answer

Information regarding dates when individual questions on notice were sent to the previous Minister is not readily available.