

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Education presents its report to the Senate.

1.2 On 9 May 2007¹ the Senate referred the following documents to the committee for examination and report in relation to the Employment and Workplace Relations and the Education, Science and Training portfolios:

- Particulars of proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2008. [Appropriation Bill No. 1 2007-2008]
- Particulars of certain proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2008. [Appropriation Bill No. 2 2007-2008]
- Particulars of proposed supplementary expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2007. [Appropriation Bill No. 5 2006-2007]
- Particulars of certain proposed supplementary expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2007. [Appropriation Bill No. 6 2006-2007]

1.3 Standing committees are required to report to the Senate on 19 June 2007.

Portfolio coverage

1.4 The Committee has responsibility for examining the expenditure and outcomes of the following:

- Education, Science and Training portfolio
- Employment and Workplace Relations portfolio

Appendix 1 lists the departments and agencies under the portfolios mentioned above.

Hearings

1.5 The committee conducted four days of hearings, examining the Employment and Workplace Relations portfolio on 28 and 29 May 2007 and the Education, Science and Training portfolio on 30 and 31 May 2007. In total the committee met for 38 hours and 41 minutes, excluding breaks.

1.6 The following agencies and groups were released from the hearings without examination: Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC), Comcare,

1 Senator Nick Minchin, *Senate Hansard*, No. 143, 9 May 2007, p. 1

Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission and the Seafarers' Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Authority.

1.7 Appendix 2 of this report lists the table of contents of the Hansard transcripts. These transcripts are available on either the committee's homepage under estimates on the Hansard website: <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commtee/comsen.asp>

Questions on notice

1.8 The committee draws the attention of the departments and agencies to the agreed deadline of Friday, 27 July 2007 for the receipt of answers to questions taken on notice from this round, in accordance with Standing Order 26.

1.9 Once again, the committee expressed its concern about the failure of the Employment and Workplace Relations portfolio to provide timely answers to questions put on notice at both the Supplementary and Additional Budget Estimates hearings in November 2006 and February 2007 respectively. The committee recognises that a proportion of questions will take longer to answer than others, but it would be encouraging to see the more straight forward questions answered quickly. At the least, a majority of questions should be answered on time, and those that are delayed should be progressively delivered to the committee as they are cleared, rather than in unwieldy bundles a day or two before the next hearings. Answers are still outstanding for both rounds and the committee expects these to be provided as soon as possible.

1.10 For this round, written questions on notice were received from Senators Brown, Carr, Crossin, Faulkner, Marshall, Siewert, Stott Despoja and Wong.

Restructure of portfolios

1.11 The committee notes that both portfolio groups under its purview have undergone structural reorganisation and name changes since the committee last reported on estimates in February 2007.

Education, Science and Training portfolio

1.12 The Department of Education, Science and Training's (DEST) outcomes and outputs structure has significantly changed for 2007-08. The Portfolio Budget Statement (PBS) states that the changes were 'implemented to better specify the Government's outcomes for education, science and training, and to enhance transparency of the administered outputs.'²

1.13 The 2007-08 structure now includes six outcomes, a doubling of the number of outcomes in 2006-07. In addition, the Department has significantly altered the structure of output groups replacing them with a description of administered programs

2 Education, Science and Training portfolio, *Portfolio Budget Statement 2007-08*, p. 16.

and related performance information. Some output groups have been mapped to more than one outcome, specifically in the case of the Indigenous and Transitions Group which is listed under Outcomes 1, 2 and 4. The committee understands that this restructuring has been accompanied by extensive recruitment of new staff to the department, indicative of a considerable expansion in the role of the department in administering a more diverse range of programs.

1.14 The table below illustrates the changes to the Department's structure:

Previous Structure	New Structure
Outcome 1 Individuals achieve high quality foundation skills and learning from schools and other providers. Output 1.1 Funding for schools Output 1.2 Assistance for individuals including those with special needs Output 1.3 Assistance for quality teaching and learning Output 1.4 Assistance for transition through and from school	Outcome 1 School Education Individuals achieve high quality foundation skills and learning from schools and other providers. <i>Administered by:</i> Schools Outcomes Group Schools Resources Group Strategic Analysis and Evaluation Group Indigenous and Transitions Group
Outcome 2 Individuals achieve relevant skills and learning outcomes from post-school education and training. Output 2.1 Funding for vocational education and training Output 2.2 New Apprenticeships Output 2.3 Assistance for skills and career development Output 2.4 Funding for higher education Output 2.5 Assistance for post school students including those with special needs	Outcome 2 Higher Education Individuals achieve relevant learning from participation in Higher Education. <i>Administered by:</i> Higher Education Group Strategic Analysis and Evaluation Group Indigenous and Transitions Group
Outcome 3 Australia has a strong science, research and innovation capacity and is engaged internationally on science, education and training to advance our social development and economic growth Output 3.1 Research infrastructure Output 3.2 Assistance for collaboration and innovation Output 3.3 Support for Australian education and training export industry and international relationships Output 3.4 National leadership in engaging people in science and technology	Outcome 3 Vocational Education and Training Individuals achieve relevant skills from post school training. <i>Administered by:</i> National Training Directions Group Industry Skills Development Group Strategic Analysis and Evaluation Group

Previous Structure	New Structure
—	Outcome 4 Transitions Individuals acquire career development skills and make successful transitions to further education, training and/or employment. <i>Administered by:</i> Indigenous and Transitions Group
—	Outcome 5 Science, Research and Innovation Australia maintains the strong science, research and innovation capacity required to generate and utilise knowledge. <i>Administered by:</i> Innovation and Research Systems Group Science Group Questacon
—	Outcome 6 International Influence Australia's international influence is enhanced through international recognition of Australia's education, research and training and strengthening and diversifying international linkages and collaboration. <i>Administered by:</i> International Education Group

Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio

1.15 There was an internal move of functions within the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) specifically affecting Outcome 2. These changes were not included in the 2007-08 PBS as they were announced after the PBS was finalised. However the committee was notified of the changes by the department prior to the hearings.

1.16 The following functions were moved from 2.2.3 *Workplace Relations Services* to 2.2.2 *Assistance to the Employment Advocate*:

- Workplace Infoline (formerly WorkChoices Infoline);
- Employer Advisory Programme (EAP);
- Workplace Advisory Service (WAS); and
- Independent Contractors advice and education

1.17 In addition, the framework compliance investigations unit previously in 2.2.1 *Industry and Australian Government employment advice* was transferred to the Workplace Ombudsman.

1.18 There were further changes announced on 4 May 2007 but these will not take effect until the relevant legislation is passed by parliament. However, the committee was advised that the name changes of the Office of the Employment Advocate and the Office of Workplace Services—to the Workplace Authority and the Workplace Ombudsman respectively—were effective immediately following the announcement and so this report will refer to these agencies accordingly. As in the case of DEST, the portfolio will have expanded responsibilities, particularly in the Workplace Authority and Workplace Ombudsman. The committee will take particular interest in the manner in which the amendments to the Workplace Relations Act will be administered.

