

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2008-09 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome 1

DEEWR Question No. EW737_09

Senator Siewert provided in writing.

Question

Early Childhood Education

When will the classrooms and facilities for these programs be in place?

Answer

The funding to support the commitment to ensure universal access to quality early childhood education in the year before formal schooling by 2013 will commence from early 2009 and will support a range of activities in each state and territory to reduce the barriers to access, according to different starting points in preschool provision. Increasing access for Indigenous children and other groups of children with low participation rates will be a priority.

The details of the implementation of universal access to early childhood education in the year before formal schooling by 2013 are currently the subject of negotiation between the Commonwealth and the states and territories through the Council of Australian Governments. All governments are working cooperatively to finalise a National Education Agreement (Schools and Early Childhood) which will be put to the Council of Australian Governments meeting in December for approval.

The Government has also committed to the establishment of up to 260 Early Learning and Care Centres by 2014 to increase the supply and access to integrated high quality, accessible and affordable child care and early childhood education programs in the year before school.

The initiative is being implemented in two phases. In phase one, the Government has allocated \$114.5 million over four years in the 2008-09 Budget for the establishment of the first 38 additional early learning and care centres in priority locations. The funding includes both the capital costs and the ongoing costs to the Government of establishing additional child care places, including Child Care Benefit and Child Care Tax Rebate.

The Government's announcement of the first 38 additional early learning and care centres includes two priority centres for the Northern Territory, to be located at Darwin and Palmerston. These centres will be operational by 2010.

In phase two, the remaining 222 centres will be progressively rolled-out by 2014 and delivered as part of new State and Commonwealth funding arrangements under COAG.

Additionally, on 3 July 2008, COAG agreed in principle to a National Partnership with joint funding of around \$547.2 million over six years to address the needs of Indigenous children in their early years. Implementation workplans are currently being negotiated between the Commonwealth and each jurisdiction. The workplans will be considered by COAG at its next meeting on 2 October 2008.