

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Budget Estimates 2010-2011**

Outcome 1 - Early Childhood

DEEWR Question No.EW0305_11

Senator Collins asked on 2/06/2010, Hansard page 16.

Question

INTEGRATED SERVICES INDEPENDENT OF COMMONWEALTH

Senator JACINTA COLLINS—As you indicated the role of the states and territories in these centres has been fairly significant as well. Can you tell me does the Commonwealth have any understanding of how many integrated services the states and territories have rolled out independently of the Commonwealth? Mr Cook—We would have to take that on notice. I come from Victoria, and Victoria has a very strong commitment to integrated centres, with over 70 I understand, in terms of the government commitment in Victoria. All the work that has been done, and the Children's Capital Program in Victoria is based on integrated children's centres predominately providing support to local communities around ensuring that families have a range of services being provided through those centres. A number of other states and territories, such as South Australia, are also predominately focusing on integrated services. We would have to take that question on notice to be able to get that information back to you. Senator JACINTA COLLINS—The reason I ask, in part, to inform that is the discussions around the double drop-off have been going on for many, many years, not just the 2007 election. Indeed, discussions with the states and the Commonwealth have been seeking to further those sorts of integrated services for quite a number of years as well. Rather than just solely the additional centres we are talking about here, I would be interested to put that in the broader perspective of how much shift there has been in the provision of services. Mr Cook—Certainly. I understand there was a question on notice at the last estimates hearing around some of the interaction between BER and early learning as well. There was over \$300 million worth of facilities around early years on school sites through BER as at the end of last year, which is a significant investment in terms of early years and the double drop-off in terms of schooling as well. I am also aware that a number of systems, for example, in Victoria, are undertaking significant regeneration projects where in fact they are bringing a whole number of schools together at a particular site, and they may be reducing schools from 10 or 11 schools down to five or six schools, but they are integrating early childhood services onto school sites as part of their regeneration project. I know that a number in the ACT have certainly been doing that as well, so a number of state and territories are looking at both the school infrastructure as well as integrated structures for zero to five years of age around community land as well. Senator JACINTA COLLINS—How difficult would it be to update that picture for the committee? Mr Cook—I think we would be able to get that information from our state and territory counterparts. Senator JACINTA COLLINS—Would outside school hours care be easily provided in that material as well? I refer to the impact of the BER. Mr Cook—We would certainly investigate that as part of that, yes.

Answer

Integrated services

Individual state and territory governments are best placed to provide details on the number of integrated services that they are establishing independent of the Commonwealth.

The Department is aware, however, that several jurisdictions are pursuing integrated service hubs and have policies in place to co-locate services where possible and where this would best suit the needs of the community. For example, in Victoria, the Children's Capital Program is based on integrated children's centres predominately providing support to local communities and ensuring that families have a range of services available to them through these centres.

The Commonwealth is also encouraging the integration of facilities through the Australian Government's investment in Children and Family Centres. The Children and Family Centres are targeted at addressing the needs of Indigenous families and their young children, and will also provide services to all families in the community. Each centre will be different to suit the community where it is located. However, every centre will:

- bring together important services for children and families including child care, early learning, parent and family support programs;
- use existing community strengths and resources to help establish the centres and make sure every centre responds effectively to its community;
- connect with other services in the community to ensure families can easily access the services they need, for example, maternal and child health services, playgroups or family literacy programs.

Early learning update

Over \$340 million worth of facilities around early years (for example, early learning centres for children aged 3 to 6 years) have been established on school sites through Building the Education Revolution (BER), as at the end of March 2010. This is a significant investment in terms of early years and the 'double drop-off' issue faced by many families.

BER projects, such as additional classrooms, have also been to the benefit of other users of school facilities, such as Outside School Hours Care services.