



SENATE
REPORT

Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee

Additional estimates 2003-04

March 2004

The Senate

Employment, Workplace Relations
and Education Legislation Committee

Additional estimates 2003-04

March 2004

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Members:	Senator George Campbell (Deputy Chair)	(ALP) NSW
	Senator Guy Barnett	(LP) Tas
	Senator Kim Carr	(ALP) VIC
	Senator David Johnston	(LP) WA
	Senator Natasha Stott Despoja	(AD) SA

Substitute Members:

Senator Andrew Murray (AD) WA	for Senator Stott Despoja for workplace relations matters
Senator Cherry (AD) QLD	for Senator Stott Despoja for employment matters
Senator Allison (AD) VIC	for Senator Stott Despoja for matters relating to schools and training

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Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Legislation Committee

Report to the Senate

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

Introduction

1.2 On 11 February 2004 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 additional expenditure for the service of the year ending on 30 June 2004
- particulars of certain proposed expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2004 and
- statement of savings expected in annual appropriations made by Act No. 55 of 2003

1.3 The committee heard evidence from Senator the Hon. Amanda Vanstone, as the Minister representing the Minister for Education, Science and Training. Additionally and heard evidence from officers of the department and related agencies on the proposed additional estimates for the Education, Science and Training portfolio including the Australian Research Council; Australian National Training Authority; Australian Institute of Marine Science; Australian National Science and Training Organisation; Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation; and Questacon.

1.4 The committee also heard evidence from Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz as the Minister representing the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, the department and related agencies on the proposed estimates for the Employment and Workplace Relations portfolio. The following agencies appeared before the committee, the Office of the Employment Advocate, and Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency.

1.5 The committee took into account the Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements 2003-2004 provided by the departments and also their annual reports for 2002-2003. Review of the proposed additional estimates expenditure for these portfolios was carried out over three days, 18, 19 and 20 February 2004.

1.6 Senators present at the hearing held on Wednesday, 18 February 2004 were Senator Tierney (Chair), and Senators Barnett, G Campbell, Carr, Collins, Crossin, Stott Despoja, Johnston and Harradine.

1.7 Senators present at the hearing held on Thursday, 19 February 2004 were Senator Tierney (Chair), and Senators G. Campbell, Carr, Marshall, Webber and Wong.

1.8 Senators present at the hearing held on Friday, 20 February 2004 were Senator Tierney (Chair) and Senators Carr, Johnston and Ludwig.

1.9 Written questions on notice were received from Senators G. Campbell, Carr, Crossin, Stott Despoja, Faulkner, Wong, Marshall and Harradine.

1.10 The committee tables for the information of the Senate copies of transcripts of evidence of committee proceedings of Wednesday, 18 February 2004, Thursday, 19 February 2004 and Friday, 20 February 2004. An appendix to the report lists the contents of the Hansard transcripts and the transcripts are available on the internet at: <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commtee/s-ewre.htm>.

Questions on notice and additional information

1.11 Standing Order 26 requires the committee to fix a date for the submission of any written answers or additional information. The committee has agreed that written answers and additional information should be submitted by Friday, 2 April 2004.

1.12 The answers to questions taken on notice at the committee's hearings and tabled documents taken at the hearings of the Additional Estimates 2004-04 will be tabled in the Senate under separate cover in numbered volumes entitled Additional Information. Lengthy documents provided as part of answers and unable to be included in the additional information volumes, which are furnished as part of the answers, will be tabled separately and available on request from the secretariat.

Matters raised at hearings

1.13 The following is an indicative, but not exhaustive, list of issues that received consideration during the estimates' hearings.

Education, Science and Training portfolio – 18 and 20 February 2004

Department of Education, Science and Training

Cross Portfolio

1.14 Senator Carr inquired as to the status of outstanding answers to questions on notice from previous hearings, and the process by which the department conducted its clearance procedure of the answers.¹

1.15 The matter of the appearance before the committee of the Chief Scientist was raised with reference to correspondence received from Dr Jeff Harmer, Secretary DEST. Further questioning covered resources the department provided in assisting the Chief Scientist and allegations of a conflict of interest raised in the Senate.²

1.16 On the matter of Mr Geoff Spring's contract and remuneration, the Secretary explained that Mr Spring's expertise was across a range of educational areas, including Indigenous education and ICT, and that it was his decision to negotiate a new contract with Mr Spring.³

1.17 Further questioning followed regarding the departmental reviews including: the evaluation of the 1999 knowledge and innovation reforms; collaboration between universities and public sector research agencies; research infrastructure; and, mapping of Australia's science and innovation system; and what costs were involved in delivering these reviews.⁴

1.18 In relation to the collaboration between the ARC and the NHMRC, and whether the department was establishing an overarching research committee to service the research agencies, the department, when questioned, explained that it had no part in this arrangement of the collaboration between the agencies. There had been a structural change within department which was decided last year. The purpose was to

¹ EWRE Hansard, 18 February 2004, pp. 3-7

² *ibid.*, pp. 7-11

³ *ibid.*, pp. 12-14

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 14-16

bring together the research related groups to improve their capacities to deal with system-wide research needs, and whole-of-government functions.⁵

1.19 Other issues discussed included: the AVCC's published report *Advancing Australia's abilities: foundations of the future of research in Australia?*; the forward estimates for Backing Australia's Ability; and the small grants program of the Higher Education Funding.⁶

Australian Research Council (ARC)

1.20 The committee noted that this would be the last estimates appearance of Professor Vicki Sara, and extended its best wishes to her. Professor Sara took the opportunity, when invited, of expressing her personal views on the need re-examine the organisational structure of the research system.⁷

1.21 When questioned about the reported existence of a 'college of experts' Professor Sara explained that previously, members of expert advisory committees had been organised into six interdisciplinary clusters to assess grants. With the formation of the college of experts, the ARC was able to remove any barriers about members being in one cluster or another, and form an expert panel to address interdisciplinary research needs in the offer of grants. Further questioning included the ways in which the ARC briefed the universities about the establishment of the college of experts, nominations for membership, and how members are chosen through their meeting at least four of the selection criteria.⁸

1.22 Professor Sara explained that the chair of the board had discussed her replacement with the Minister and that the vacancy would be filled after an internationally search.⁹

1.23 Senator Harradine questioned the ARC on its funding of the establishment of the National Stem Cell Centre; its research into stem cells; research funding from the Commonwealth and commercial organisations; and the formation of an independent ethics advisory committee.¹⁰

1.24 Senator Carr also questioned the ARC on its collaboration with ANSTO and CSIRO regarding applications for training fellowships. Professor Sara mentioned that a special scheme had been developed between ARC and CSIRO to jointly support

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 17-19

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 19-22

⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 23-25

⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 25-28

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 28

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 32-38

postdoctoral fellowships to encourage collaboration between the universities and CSIRO, and that ARC had discussed a similar proposal with AIMS and ANSTO.¹¹

1.25 Further questioning of the ARC included: the US free trade agreement; the international collaboration; the linkage projects and discovery projects; the high turnover of media and communications personnel; the awarding of fellowships for 2004; ARC's outsourcing of administrative functions; their involvement in reviews; the report on the study on return on investment; additional work to measure the performance of the ARC; and implementation of the Government's decisions under Knowledge and Innovation and Backing Australia's Ability.¹²

Issues relevant to Indigenous and Transitions Group

Outcome 1 - Individuals achieve high quality foundation skills and learning outcomes from schools and other providers.

Output 1.2: Assistance for individuals, including those with special needs

Output 1.4: Assistance for transition through and from school

Outcome 2 - Individuals achieve relevant skills and learning outcomes from post school education and training for work and life

Output 2.5: Assistance for post school students including those with special needs

1.26 Following the previous hearing held in November, Senator Crossin further questioned the department on the Career and Transition (CAT) Pilot and Partnership Outreach Education Model (POEM) programs and the report of the coordination and evaluation of the CAT and POEM pilots. The department responded that the CAT pilot has worked well, with key finding set out in the preliminary report. Both programs have been extended to the end of 2004, and are in the final stages of undergoing an exhaustive evaluation report, to be finalised shortly.¹³

1.27 Senator Crossin asked a number of questions about reviews of Indigenous education and training programs, including the IEDA program, the Indigenous education consultative bodies and support units; the ATAS bulk funding arrangements and the review of ABSTUDY.¹⁴

1.28 In response to questions regarding the IEDA program and the reason why the report had not been made public, the department reported that the review had been completed and that it is being used to inform decisions for the forthcoming quadrennium on its Indigenous education policy. The Secretary further explained that the report formed part of the consideration for the interaction between the IEDA and

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 38

¹² *ibid.*, pp. 28-32, 37-41

¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 41-42

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 42-49

the IESIP programs and involved negotiations and discussions with the states which the department was being careful not to prejudice.¹⁵ Under the IEDA review the department examined the ASSPA agenda, and has conducted and recorded case studies of how the funds are being used by parents and the community in educational decision making of their children.¹⁶

1.29 In discussions regarding the ABSTUDY review, Senator Crossin asked the department how this review would be handled. DEST's response was that this review of the effect of the 2000 changes is to be conducted within the strategic analysis and review area, with possibly some requirement to outsource certain aspects of the review. Relevant groups in the education and the Indigenous communities would be consulted.¹⁷

1.30 Other areas of questioning included: an update of the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council formation and invitations for stakeholders to identify representatives to join the council; additional funding for Batchelor College; allocation of Indigenous support funding for 2004; and the removal of the Batchelor College from the ISF funding formula due to their unique status in running non-award courses in addition to undergraduate programs.¹⁸

Australian National Training Authority (ANTA)

Issues relevant to Vocational Education and Training (VET) Group

Outcome 2

Output 2.1: Funding for vocational education systems and training

Output 2.2: New Apprenticeships

Output 2.3: Assistance for skills and career development

1.31 Senator Johnston continued his questioning from the previous hearings regarding the funding of a training facility at Welshpool conducted by the CFMEU, with funding from the Commonwealth of approximately \$1m in 1998-99. ANTA advised that it had received information from the Western Australian government that an amount equivalent to the grant is now treated as a loan between the CFMEU and the CSTC. The Western Australian government had not foreseen this development, and were seeking further legal advice on its options.

1.32 Among other matters regarding this issue, Senator Johnston questioned ANTA as what audit capacities are in place to monitor monies paid to the states which they administer to training faculties. ANTA explained that it is not able to audit

¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 42-43

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 43

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 47, 48

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 50

individual skills centres, but the relevant guidelines were now under review. The committee was also informed that the ANAO would be looking at approximately 36 skills centres. Information provided was later corrected by an ANTA officer in a letter to the committee. Senator Tierney also sought advice from ANTA about the reporting requirements which were in place in 1998 for outcomes and acquittal of monies.¹⁹

1.33 Senator Crossin asked about the timeframe for 2003-2004 ANTA agreement. ANTA advised on negotiations between the Commonwealth and the states and territories. As two issues could not be resolved, the current agreement would continue for another 12 months, with negotiations recommencing in October 2004.²⁰

1.34 Questions were asked on the growth in VET. The department advised that a report commissioned from Access Economics made projections of the likely growth and demand for VET from 2004 to 2010 of an average annual growth of 2.7 per cent which DEST believed to be a realistic figure. Questions followed regarding additional funding to cover this expected growth.²¹

1.35 Questioning then proceeded on how the department would administer 10,000 new vocational educational and training places for older workers, parents returning to work and people with a disability, announced by the minister with funding of \$29.4 million.²²

Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS)

1.36 Advice was given on finding a replacement for Professor Stephen Hall as head of AIMS. The committee was informed that the institute had advertised the position internationally. Of the six final short listed applicants, four are foreign applicants.²³

1.37 AIMS officers were asked a series of questions concerning the joint project between AIMS and James Cook University. AIMS advised that a memorandum of understanding was now being developed into an agreement, with agreement also on a possible five-person board to manage the collaboration. Further questions followed regarding the appointment of a part-time executive officer sourced from either AIMS or JCU; administrative details of the working party; the research program within the joint venture, and the details of how the funding grant will be dispersed.²⁴

¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 50-55

²⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 55-57

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 57

²² *ibid.*, pp. 59-63

²³ *ibid.*, p. 66

²⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 66-69

Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO)

1.38 The committee noted that the new CEO Dr Ian Smith will commence his appointment in May 2004.

1.39 Questioning then turned to the construction of the new reactor, which is approximately six months behind schedule, the licencing process with ARPANSA and the possibility of loading fuel by November 2005. ANSTO informed the committee of the program of decommissioning the old reactor, the fuel constraints involved which will run out in 2006 and contingency planning of running the old reactor until the new reactor is operational. ANSTO further explained the complex process to obtain fuel, and a possible agreement with the United States for the return of unexpended fuel. The committee was also informed that the new reactor is a multipurpose research reactor, required for both scientific research and for nuclear medicine.²⁵

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)

1.40 Questions were asked about press speculation regarding addition funding in the May budget. Dr Geoff Garrett informed the committee that CSIRO had not been officially advised of the additional money, but they are looking for additional support for their flagship programs for the following four years.²⁶

1.41 Questions were asked regarding the flagship program funding. CSIRO responded the flagship program is a major part of CSIRO's strategic direction, forming a major component of their research portfolio. The committee was advised that without the additional funding the CSIRO would need to look at their overall investment portfolio. Questions followed regarding flagship programs, including; the heads the flagship programs; the Food Futures flagship and the universities involved ANU, La Trobe, Monash, Newcastle, Melbourne, Queensland and Sydney, and Fisheries RDC, Biogemma as key partners in the flagship. Further negotiations with other commercial organisation are continuing. The light metals flagship was also mentioned by CSIRO in relation to contributing resources and aligning their development projects with CSIRO research, including General Motors Holden, General Motors in Detroit, Alcan, Alcoa, BHP Billiton, Comalco and Iluka.²⁷

1.42 Questions were also asked about the appointment of a permanent communications director; the sector advisory councils, and why there are no trade union representation on these councils.²⁸

1.43 CSIRO was questioned extensively about its method in letting consultancies, with particular reference to Mr Dean from Groman. CSIRO advised the committee

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 70-73

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 73-74

²⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 74-79

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 80-81

that it has implemented appropriate and rigorous procurement processes for appointing consultants, which enable them to purchase services on the basis of expediency and experience. In retrospect, however, and in considering the problems with vetting of answers to questions on notice, and with earlier criticism of the consultancy process, the CSIRO has agreed to re-evaluate its consultancy procurement.²⁹

1.44 Other issues raised were: the Australian Geosciences Council's concern regarding the developments at CSIRO's North Sydney facility and the scaling down of the laboratories and the *Insight 03* staff survey.³⁰

1.45 CSIRO was also questioned about the issue of the wheat streak mosaic virus discovered in January 2003 in its Canberra laboratory and the justification for the destruction of affected plants and why the virus had only recently been detected. The CSIRO explained that, in hindsight, the action to destroy all experiments may have been extreme, as the virus is transmitted by a particular mite which only survives between 18 – 24 hours off a plant.³¹

1.46 Additional topics of discussion included the importation of eucalyptus material by Dr McRae and the report from the *Sydney Morning Herald* which claims that the CSIRO is responsible for a 25 percent cut in the estimates cost of the Stanwell magnesium smelter project.³²

Questacon

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 3.4: National Leadership in engaging people in science and technology

1.47 The committee welcomed Questacon to its first ever appearance before the Senate estimates. Professor Graham Durant explained that Questacon was a semi-autonomous agency within the DEST portfolio and being semi-commercial, had to raise a significant part of its revenue from earned income.³³

1.48 The following is a list of issues discussed by the committee and Questacon: Backing Australia's Ability funding; operating expenses; staff numbers and their roles; the cost to run the science circuses and their programs in visiting schools and community events; the science squad of professional science communicators

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 81-93

³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 94-98

³¹ *ibid.*, pp. 98-100

³² *ibid.*, pp. 100-102

³³ *ibid.*, pp. 102-103

operating in western Sydney delivering programs to schools. Professor Durant commented that other states were developing science programs using Questacon's program as the prototype.³⁴

Issues relevant to Science Group

Outcome 3

Output 3.2: Assistance for science collaboration and innovation

1.49 The main topic of questioning involved the Cooperative Research Centre programs, including the CRC evaluation study conducted by Howard Partners; the new guidelines published in December 2003 which will move the program towards achieving a contribution towards industrial, commercial and economic growth; and the selection process from organisations for funding under this round of the program.³⁵

Issues relevant to Schools Group

Outcome 1 - Individuals achieve high quality foundation skills and learning outcomes from schools and other providers

Output 1.1 Funding for schools

Output 1.2 Assistance for individuals, including those with special needs

Output 1.4 Assistance for transition through and from school

Outcome 2

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

1.50 Questions were asked about recent media reports of a new for-profit private primary school to be established in Queensland, ABC Learning Centre, and whether public funding, under section 47 under the current act, is limited to schools that are not for profit and which comply with Commonwealth financial acquittal processes. Other establishments mentioned in this connection were: Taylors in Melbourne, Reddam House, Kilmore International School, Aim Secondary Music College in NSW, Murdoch College in WA and the University Senior College with requests for more details to be provided.³⁶

1.51 The matter of the Minister's press release was raised in regard to the current publicity campaign of the AEU in regard to budget increases to state schools, and requesting the department for more details of the calculation of state budgets papers.

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 104-107

³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 107-110

³⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 110-113

Further questioning continued in the area of state budget funding: non public school funding; the introduction of the bill for the next quadrennium funding agreement; changes to the SES system for non-government schools and the collection of information to re-assess the SES score.³⁷

1.52 The final issue raised was in regard to establishment grants, in particular for Glendale Christian College, and the Institute of Senior Education; STEA grants and the criteria to apply for eligibility; and the issue of teaching of the science curriculum in particular schools.³⁸

Issues relevant to Higher Education Group – 20 February 2004

Outcome 2

Output 2.4: Funding for Higher Education

Output 2.5: Assistance for post school students including those with special needs

Outcome 3

Output 3.1: Research Infrastructure

1.53 Questions were asked about the training report and the graduate skills assessment. The department took a series of questions on notice regarding the evaluation of the GSA, including comparisons of similar tests used in the United States.³⁹

1.54 Other issues raised were: HESB, including the costs of increasing the HECS-HELP threshold; the Commonwealth Grants Scheme guidelines; funding for the Australian Maritime College and the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education; effect of HESB on doubtful HECS debt; changes to the new higher education legislation and updating the BAF web site to reflect the changes; the advisory group for the learning and Teaching Performance Fund; funding estimates for the Commonwealth Grants Scheme and the consultation process for guidelines for the CGS and various other guidelines including; Indigenous Support Fund component; the student learning entitlements, FEE-HELP, OS-HELP, HECS transitional guidelines, the PELS transitional guidelines, reduction and repayment guidelines.⁴⁰

1.55 Also subject to questioning was the induction of the HEIMS project and the planning by universities to implement the modifications to their IT systems, to enable them to allocate the Commonwealth higher education student support number. Other issues covered were: marginally funded and places and over-enrolments by universities; evaluation of the RTS and its capacity to achieve its objectives; criticism of the RTS by the vice-chancellors; a legal challenge to the RTS launched by the

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 113-125

³⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 125-134

³⁹ EWRE Hansard, 20 February 2004, pp. 1-5

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 5-13

University of Melbourne and the basis upon which publications were counted for the purposes of attracting research funding.⁴¹

Issues relevant to Australian Education International Group

Outcome 2

Output 2.1: Funding for vocational education and training

Outcome 3

Output 3.3: Support for the Australian education and training export industry and international relationships

1.56 Questions were asked about the effect of the proposed Australia-United States free trade agreement on Australian education, consultation between DFAT and DEST and the effect of the agreement on Australian IP. Other matters raised were the protection of Australian quality of education services and the registration quality assurance procedures. Senator Carr asked whether this agreement would allow organisations such as Greenwich University to slip under the current regulatory arrangements. The department was reassuring.⁴²

1.57 Senator Carr again raised issues concerning training providers of international education in Australia; matters of quality and the links between international students and crime; student visas; and further queries concerning the business dealings of Uniworld College.⁴³

Employment and Workplace Relations portfolio – 19 February 2004

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

Outcome 1: An effectively functioning labour market

Output 1.1: Labour market policy and analysis

Output 1.2: Labour market program management and delivery

Job Network

1.58 Questioning started with issues relating to the new job seeker account and the training account, the department explaining that the training account for Indigenous and mature age job seekers. The department stated that this was the first year of the active participation model of the job seeker account, on the basis of reimbursement of expenses for the clients looking for work. Officials explained that the allocation of

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp. 13-38

⁴² *ibid.*, pp. 38-42

⁴³ *ibid.*, pp. 42-48

expenditure to Job Network members for the job seekers would not be determined until the end of the current financial year.⁴⁴

1.59 Extensive questioning continued on issues including: job seeker incentives, with the example of the use of mobile phones to assist with access to job information, particularly through SMS messaging⁴⁵; departmental modelling in relation to the four key target groups; the assessment of individuals by Centrelink; the reconciliation of shared databases; and assistance for people on disability support pensions and people on parenting allowances. Pilot programs were currently running for both groups; the later group's pilot work the improvement of the connections between the Transition to Work program and Job Network services.⁴⁶

1.60 The department was questioned on the modelling process for Job Network 3, developed by Econtech. Senator Campbell raised the issue of information gained from Centrelink, FaCS, and the Prime Minister and Cabinet Department which outlines concerns about the number of job seekers. Officials advised that they were aware of the concerns from Centrelink in regard to the implementation of the IT system and system problems.⁴⁷

1.61 A number of questions were taken on notice regarding an article which appeared in *the Sunday Herald Sun*, entitled 'Thousands set to lose jobs benefit' and a similar article place in the *Sunday Telegraph* regarding compliance to requirements.⁴⁸

1.62 Further questioning to the department resulted from another article which appeared in *The Australian* on 11 July regarding the claim of job seekers failing to turn up to meetings with Job Network providers, and of other disputed appointments figures. The Government stood by its claim that ultimately 80 per cent of job seekers attend meetings with job providers.⁴⁹

1.63 The department was then questioned on the following matters: the concerns raised by FaCS regarding the pool of activity tested job seekers and the basis of the department's modelling; the department's attempt to increase labour market participation rates for key target groups into the services of Job Network; the interdepartmental committee on Job Network; providers' contracts regarding payments of outcomes and delivery of certain services; discussion on 60,000 job seekers failing to attend interviews as at August 2003; the Employment Innovation Fund; participation in the Transition to Work program; Pathways Employment Services proposals, including Pasmenco and Westlakes Training; effects of delaying job search

⁴⁴ EWRE Hansard, 19 February 2004, pp. 3-8

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 30-33

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 8-13

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 13-18

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 18-21

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 21

assistance to retrenched workers; refusal of organisations to advertise on the Australian Job Search web site; the campaign to encourage the use of Job Network by employers in targeted areas; skills shortages in the manufacturing sector; job growth in the hospitality industry; active participation models to help address industry skill shortage needs, for example, the pilot Illawarra apprenticeship project and a project with Group Training Australia in finding way in which apprenticeship vacancies can be filled using Job Network services and Job Network key performance indicators.⁵⁰

Cross-portfolio

1.64 The department was asked questions relating to staff turnover over the past three years; star ratings on web sites; and issues regarding the expiry of certificates which the department use to secure its servers and communication traffic between DEWR and the Job Network members.⁵¹

Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA)

1.65 The main topic of questioning of EOWA related to the paid maternity leave survey. EOWA also informed the committee that it had provided a paper on the policy document prepared by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner.⁵²

1.66 Questions were asked regarding the interdepartmental work and family task force. The Director further explained that EOWA has operational knowledge of approaches that companies were taking on to provide solutions to have work and family policies in place, but had no policy role to play in these matters.⁵³

1.67 Other issues raised were the number of women on boards or in management and the role of the day-to-day work at the EOWA.⁵⁴

Office of Employment Advocate

1.68 The OEA was questioned on the freedom of association telephone survey it contacted and the responses by industry and occupation. The committee was told that the survey was complex and large, with various filters employed, and the results of the survey were being analysed with a view to be released by the end of March 2004.⁵⁵

1.69 Extensive questioning by the committee followed regarding the use of AWAs in the workforce, including young people on AWAs; the number of AWAs in the

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 21-30, 33-46

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 45-49

⁵² *ibid.*, pp. 50-53

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 51

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 52-53

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 53-54

Commonwealth public service and the proportion with the rest of the workforce; the no-disadvantage test for rejection of an AWA and withdrawals of AWAs.⁵⁶

1.70 Questioning continued on the proposed legislation to enable AWAs to commence operation from the time they are signed.⁵⁷

1.71 Other questions were asked about voluntary overtime, and casual employment workshops conducted by the OEA.⁵⁸

Cross-portfolio

1.72 Further questions were asked about DEWR's own employment practices in regard to AWAs and certified agreements. The department informed the committee that employees have a choice. Further questioning followed regarding DEWR's graduate program.⁵⁹

Outcome 2: Higher productivity, higher pay workplaces

Output 2.1: Workplace relations policy and analysis

Output 2.2: Workplace relations implementation

1.73 Questions were asked about the department's assistance with the implementation of amendments to Workplace Relations Act in relation to Victorian workers. The department took a number of questions no notice.⁶⁰

1.74 The department was asked a series of questions concerning the Econtech report on productivity in the building industry.⁶¹

1.75 Further questioning was raised in relation to the International Labour Organisation, following on from the committee's examination at the previous hearings.⁶²

1.76 Senator Wong followed up questioning with the department on issues raised with the EOWA regarding work and family issues. The department informed the committee that they had not commissioned any surveys at this time but did analyse

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 54-60

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 62-63

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 64-71

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 71-78

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 78

⁶¹ *ibid.*, pp. 78-82

⁶² *ibid.*, pp. 82-84, 91-93

'family friendly policies' through enterprise agreements on maternity leave, part-time work, casual work and return to work.⁶³

1.77 The department was also questioned about the following: the wage analysis survey conducted by Sensis Pty Ltd; the minimum wage case; the minister's intervention in matters of public interest; guidelines in relation to AWAs; the building industry code of conduct; Australia Post's project; numbers and investigation of complaints regarding underpayment or non-payment of wages; and the employee entitlement safety net schemes; and the ANAO's report on the Special Employee Entitlement Scheme for Ansett.⁶⁴

Interim Building Industry Taskforce

1.78 The head of the taskforce was questioned at length about inspectors and the investigations of building sites; the taskforce's responsibility to follow up matters of alleged breaches of awards and agreements; OH&S issues; investigation of underpayment or non-payment of workers compensation premiums; and illegal workers, with specific mention of the water tower project in Lake Cargelligo.⁶⁵

1.79 Officers from DEWR also explained matters relating staffing and the roles the officers of the taskforce.⁶⁶

Acknowledgments

1.80 The committee is grateful for the assistance given to it by Senator the Hon. Amanda Vanstone, Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz and officers of the departments and agencies concerned.

Senator John Tierney
Chair

March 2004

⁶³ *ibid.*, pp. 84-91

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 91-115

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 116-133

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 118-130

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