



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION  
AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2022–2023](#))

**Members:**

**MR M PETTERSSON (Chair)  
MS N LAWDER (Deputy Chair)**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**MONDAY, 13 NOVEMBER 2023**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Ms K Langham (Ph: 620 75498)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

## APPEARANCES

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## **Privilege statement**

The Assembly has authorised the recording, broadcasting and re-broadcasting of these proceedings.

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Witnesses must tell the truth: giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter, and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly.

While the committee prefers to hear all evidence in public, it may take evidence in-camera if requested. Confidential evidence will be recorded and kept securely. It is within the power of the committee at a later date to publish or present all or part of that evidence to the Assembly; but any decision to publish or present in-camera evidence will not be taken without consulting with the person who gave the evidence.

*Amended 20 May 2013*

## **The committee met at 1 pm.**

Berry, Ms Yvette, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women

### Education Directorate

Simmons, Ms Jane, Deputy Director-General

Efthymiades, Ms Deb, Deputy Director-General, System Policy and Reform

Moysey, Mr Sean, Executive Branch Manager, Education and Care Regulation Support

### Community Services Directorate

Rule, Ms Catherine, Director General

Summerrell, Mrs Jessica, Executive Branch Manager, Support Services for Children, Communities

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon and welcome to the public hearings of the Education and Community Inclusion Committee for its inquiry into annual and financial reports 2022-23. The committee will today examine annual reports of the Education Directorate and the Community Services Directorate.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the tradition custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

The proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard, and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and web-streamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful for all of us if you use the words, "I will take that question on notice."

We now welcome Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Early Childhood Development, and officials. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. Could I please get each of you to confirm that you understand the implications of the statement and that you agree to comply with it.

**Ms Simmons:** Yes, I confirm I have read the statement and comply with the statement.

**Mr Moysey:** Yes, I do.

**Ms Efthymiades:** Yes, I do.

**Ms Berry:** Yes, I do.

**Ms Rule:** Yes, I do.

**THE CHAIR:** As we are not having opening statements, we will now proceed to questions, and we will make our way down the line. Minister, what preparations have been under way for the delivery of the ACT government's commitment to providing all three-year-old children with access to one day per week of free quality early childhood education?

**Ms Berry:** I thank you for that question. A number of years of work have been going on to begin to provide access to free three-year-old preschool starting in 2024. Members of the committee might be aware that the previous phase-in of the project—through working with the sector—was a targeted program. It was targeting around 700 young people—through soft referrals, through early childhood settings and through child and family services—to allow children and families who might not have the same chance to access three-year-old preschool, and might not be able to afford to or be involved in early childhood education in any part of their lives, to be referred to a service and be able to access that early childhood experience.

I was talking to a provider on Friday night at the Early Childhood Australia Awards, who was telling me about some of the experiences that she had with young people who were engaged in that part of the program, and the difference it had made to those young people and their families' lives by providing the additional wrap-around supports to those families to keep those young people in preschool, and by providing other supports to the families to ensure that, when they start formal education, they have all the supports available and are ready to go.

With respect to the three-year-old program, we have been working really closely with the sector to understand the capacity of the sector. You should also understand that we know that there are workforce challenges within the sector as well, so the program does need to be phased out and there needs to be a separate strategy on workforce. Also part of the three-year-old preschool plan is the ACT early childhood workforce strategy, which recognises those challenges, but aligns more to the delivery of the broader program for early childhood reforms.

Last week we announced that there were 130 services across Canberra who had signed on to be part of the free three-year-old preschool in 2024, which is fantastic support from the sector to begin rolling out the three-year-old program. It is the ACT government's biggest investment in early childhood, so we are keen to make sure it works, obviously, but also to make sure that the 300 hours per year of free preschool that starts in 2024 is delivered by a quality workforce that has the skills. So, supporting the workforce has been, as I said, an important part of this strategy. I might ask Deb if she can provide some more detail on the workforce strategy, about how that is being rolled out.

**Ms Efthymiades:** So, there are a lot of elements of the workforce strategy, and a number of them do not require funding—it is really just about concerted effort—but there were also a number that were announced in the budget which amounted to \$2.8 million over four years, and there are a few elements of that that are probably worth mentioning. The first one is called Early Learning Connections, and that is really about career pathways for women in early childhood education and care.

We are in the process now of establishing the deed with a provider for that work, but there are a number of elements in that. There is wrap-around support for up to 260 individuals to undertake a cert 3 diploma or degree qualification. There is study financial assistance and paid leave arrangements for participants. There is employer support, including coaching and mentoring via the Australian Institute of Management, and there are group coaching workshops and facilitation of ongoing support. So that is the biggest budget line—\$1.6 million of the \$2.8 million.

There is also a bit over half a million dollars for scholarships for First Nations educators, specifically for Koori preschools, around diploma or degree qualifications, and there is another half a million dollars—about \$300,000 on a resource portal, and \$200,000 on a professional development network. So, there are a lot of elements, and the final bit, I guess, is \$150,000 for a sector census to deepen our understanding. All of those pieces were pulled together based on deep consultation with the sector, but the sector also said, “We think you might want to go out and see what else people are saying,” so there is a census that will be run to get that deeper information that can inform the steps after these first ones. So that is the workforce strategy stuff.

**Ms Berry:** I just want to talk a bit more about the wrap-around supports as part of the investment in the funding for scholarships. We learnt through feedback from the sector that it was really very difficult for early childhood educators to leave their service and for those positions to be filled while they were doing that additional study. So that funding goes towards working with the service to ensure that those people who want to get additional qualifications do not have to work and do their qualification at the same time; they can get the time off and the service can work through replacements with that funding so that the person can go and do that education without having to work at the same time.

That has been, I think, a really important part of the strategy for the workforce. Something we heard very clearly was that we needed a quality workforce and opportunities to do professional learning, but those opportunities could only come if they could be replaced at work.

**THE CHAIR:** And how many providers are signed on to facilitate three-year-old preschool?

**Ms Efthymiades:** There are 130 services. That is 131 as of today; another one signed up last week. We actually have 70 providers out of a possible 95—so that is 75 per cent—and 131 out of a possible 169 services, which is about 78 per cent. That is a really good, strong start. There are others that are very interested and for different reasons do not feel 2024 is exactly the time for them, but we will continue to work with them. The educate and inform side of our regulator will work with them and see if they can be made ready for 2025 or whenever it is that suits them.

**THE CHAIR:** In regard to the geographic spread of those providers, is each district in the ACT equally represented?

**Ms Efthymiades:** As equally represented as the sector is now. There is very good coverage across all areas, and that is particularly helpful because if something is

universal you need it to cover all geographical areas even if not absolutely every service is involved. So, yes, there is a fantastic spread. In fact, the *Canberra Times* put a visual in an article last week, and I think you can see from that that it is a really comprehensive mapping.

**MS LAWDER:** Just so I can understand this a bit better, you have talked about supporting staff to do study, and that their positions would be filled to allow them to study without having to work at the same time. Are you confident you will get the staff to support this program, given we have already seen some shortages in this sector?

**Ms Berry:** The program works within an existing early childhood setting, so the staff are already there. The scholarships that we are providing are for educators to upskill and to increase and improve their qualifications. With respect to some of the services that Ms Efthymiades talked about, which were not quite ready to be part of the program, it could be for a range of reasons. It could be that they do not have an early childhood teacher within their setting; that they are not offering a preschool program at the moment. Those are the kinds of things we want to support those services to achieve, so that then they can join up and be part of the service. Some services have degree-holder educators who are seeking to upskill to become early childhood teachers, and so that is part of those scholarships as well.

So, yes, there is still work to do as far as getting the sector in the right place and providing a preschool education with a qualified preschool teacher, and that is why the workforce strategy was an important part of rolling out the program.

**MS LAWDER:** You talked about supporting study, including with First Nations educators and the census and some other work. Is some of that a direct admin cost of the directorate, or, if not, how much will it cost the directorate?

**Ms Efthymiades:** There are existing officers who have been leading this work—

**MS LAWDER:** So it will be done within existing resources?

**Ms Efthymiades:** —and it is within existing resources. Yes; none of the extra budget is for directorate FTE.

**MR HANSON:** I have a few questions on this. With respect to the capacity for one day a week, what is stopping us from going further? I know that you have not announced it as a policy. Is it the facilities or staff? I mean, have these centres indicated they can do more, or are we limited to one day a week at the moment?

**Ms Berry:** I think that is why we started with the targeted phase-in—it was to understand how the program would work within the early childhood setting. Each state and territory has a range of different kindergarten or preschool programs. In the ACT, we have government preschools, which provide four-year-old preschools. Not all states and territories have that connected with their schools. We do. We are a bit unique—with a couple of others—in delivering that.

There were never going to be enough facilities to provide three-year-old preschool in

addition to four-year-old in government facilities, so we rolled out to the sector and first engaged with partners to start that phase-in, and work on what the program would actually look like and understand what the workforce issues were so that we could engage with those issues and then work on a workforce strategy.

The phase-in enabled us to iron out a few of the issues that might have arisen as a result of putting these extra requirements, I guess, on the early childhood sector, but also made sure that we continued with that targeted program. That targeted program still continues in addition to this three-year-old universal access. Whilst we would all like to be able to go ahead and provide the additional days for three-year-olds, we have still got to work on the workforce issues, and that is one of the main challenges, I think, that would be in place for the sector being able to provide the two days. Is there anything more that I have missed there?

**Ms Efthymiades:** To build on what the minister said, 2024 is obviously our first year. Now, about 73 to 75 per cent of three-year-olds are already engaged in early childhood education and care, so what we are not sure of yet is how many people will seek to have an extra day added to their current offering, or how many people might say, “I will just take the gap fee, thanks, for 300 hours that I am already accessing.” We do not know what the actual uplift will be in numbers, so 2024 will really help us get a read on that.

There is about 73 to 75 per cent there. There is up to 10 per cent covered through the targeted program. So, before those positions are filled, that will be another 10 per cent. We are kind of looking at 15 per cent or less of the three-year-old population in the ACT that is not yet accessing, and we do not know what the uptake will be there, either.

The one day a week, as the minister said, is primarily driven by making sure we have got the workforce quality stuff sorted, because if this is not a quality three-year-old preschool program, which is different to free childcare—it is a quality preschool program led by a qualified teacher—then we will not get those benefits that are so clearly in the international research for the three-year-old investment.

**MR HANSON:** How many three-year-olds are accessing the program at the moment?

**Ms Efthymiades:** The targeted one?

**MR HANSON:** In total.

**Ms Efthymiades:** The universal program commences at the start of next year, so there are none yet. They are in the process, though, because all the services have been identified. Parents are now engaging with those services and registering, et cetera, for participation in 2024, but that is very early days. The announcement was only two weeks ago.

In terms of the targeted program, basically we have observed a pattern in the last two years because they are in there as three-year-olds and then they move onto four-year-olds. So the little people are eligible to start when they turn three, and those numbers build throughout a year. Over the last two years they have built to about 350.



Then about 200 of those go to four-year-olds, so it is down to about 150, and it builds back up through the year. That is the pattern we have observed just over the last two years. That may change.

Overall, the minister is absolutely right. For the end of financial year I think we had 787, or something, who been referred. Let me just make sure I get the right number here. I had the percentage; I have written it somewhere else, though. Of those referred, 94 per cent took up the offer of a placement. Now, at the end of October, we are up to 888 who have been referred. So, an extra 100 have been referred in that time with, again, about the same uptake of 95 per cent. It is developing into an annual cycle as children turn three and then they turn four, and they move on into four-year-old preschool, but they are the ballpark numbers over the last two years.

**MR HANSON:** For the universal model, the funding model, the provider gets an amount and the parent gets an amount; is that right?

**Ms Efthymiades:** The total amount per child is \$2,500 to the service. The first thing that has to come from that \$2,500 is the gap—the reimbursement, if you like, or the deduction from the bill to the family. That is averaging at \$1,329, but it will be whatever it is. If it is less than that for the 300 hours, that is what the family will get back. If it is more than that, that is what the family will get back. But the average is that.

The remainder is for program delivery, particularly investing in the workforce, because that is obviously our critical priority, and ensuring the quality is there for the delivery. They are the parameters for the rest of the money per child.

**MR HANSON:** How are you informing parents that this program is out there? Are they going to sort of wait until they enrol kids? There are a lot of parents, no doubt, with a two-year-old who are unaware of this, and they are going to bump up against it and just find out. Is it the providers who are going to provide that information?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Providers all have their packages, so obviously if there is a family engaged, they will be letting them know as soon as they are eligible, et cetera, but there has also been a broader comms campaign. There has been targeted comms through and with services, et cetera, and a lot of social media. It is pretty comprehensive. It is a tier 1 campaign, I believe, which means that we have the whole power of the Chief Minister's communications behind it as well.

**Ms Berry:** All of the early childhood centres have information at the front of their service, so you can see straight away if they are partnering up with the government on this program. All of the services that are partnering up, their information is available on the Education Directorate's website. It would not take much for a person who was wanting to engage in early childhood education and preschool to find out where a service is that they could connect with.

**Ms Efthymiades:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** What is the total cost of the program? I think we have covered it in estimates, probably.

**Ms Efthymiades:** The universal is a bit over \$50 million over four years, and then the targeted program is a bit over \$7 million per year.

**MR HANSON:** Yes, right. And are you going to—next year, I imagine—do a review to see whether that \$50 million is the right figure?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** To see whether you had more people or less people?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Yes. It is effectively a demand-driven funding envelope, so that is what has been put aside now, but whatever is needed will be committed to and delivered. There is no cap on it at the moment; it is demand driven.

**MR HANSON:** So, do you think we will get a clearer idea next year at the budget? Estimates next year might give us a bit of clearer idea.

**Ms Berry:** I think it will be a start, but I think it will take a little bit longer than 12 months to really have engaged with and communicated with our community about what this program is about.

**MR HANSON:** And is this a model that is rolled out in any other jurisdiction?

**Ms Berry:** Not like this.

**Ms Efthymiades:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** Or a universal program for four-year-olds, or is this model unique?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Four-year-olds is, as the minister mentioned, only available in a few jurisdictions like Northern Territory, Western Australia, us, and Tasmania. The others have not had a four-year-old program, but of course there were big announcements made in Victoria and New South Wales, in particular, about uplifting four-year-olds and three-year-olds. Victoria is probably the furthest down the track in terms of three-year-old implementation, but they also still have a very long time horizon to deliver on where they are going, so probably—

**Ms Berry:** The initial part of their funding was building facilities.

**Ms Efthymiades:** Yes, so that they would have the places.

**Ms Berry:** They did not have the infrastructure, whereas we have the existing services.

**MR HANSON:** So really, whether it is a budget decision or not that that is an impediment, but is the decision a staffing one rather than a facilities one from us? Is that right?

**Ms Berry:** I would say so, at the moment.

**Ms Efthymiades:** Yes, staging it so that we can be confident that there is sufficient workforce. I guess the really encouraging part of that is that the 131 services that have joined us already, meet what is required around the workforce. So, they have an existing qualified teacher or they are working towards it—they have evidence of having someone that is in the qualification process. It is really encouraging that 78 per cent are already there, and then we are working with the others around a range of things.

**MR HANSON:** Are you going to have some sort of audit process on those centres to make sure that it is actually delivering what we want it to? How does that work?

**Ms Efthymiades:** There are two elements to that. I will start and then hand over to Mr Moysey, who will talk about it from the regulator’s perspective. The first part of it is that the data system that sits with this, which is a critical element to us being able to leverage off the Commonwealth payments, will provide the necessary information to show that they are not rolling a whole of two-year-olds in or there is not weird stuff going on. So there is an assurance mechanism there. There is also an uplift in terms of the quality assurance element within CECA, the Children’s Education and Care Assurance that Mr Moysey oversees, so I will hand to him for a bit more detail.

**Mr Moysey:** The context, Mr Hanson, is that around the country we saw from the national workforce census that there has been a significant change in the workforce. Every jurisdiction, especially the ACT, is working on rebuilding that workforce. We know that there is a significant component of the workforce that is relatively new. I think as an early adopter the ACT was early with its early childhood scholarship program for tertiary.

We are seeing the results of that program by having the settings, as the minister said, supporting staff and services and providers to keep their staff with them while they do their pracs. They support the service as much as the individual. We are seeing a growing number of people who are undertaking tertiary qualifications within services, so they are actually there. There are 39 at the moment, and they are on track to finish their qualifications. A lot of the settings that we put in, in particular around the educating form function that we do, as the regulator, lay the groundwork to support providers and services to develop their staff. So if you have got staff, hold on to them. What can you do to hold onto them? What can you do to develop?

In the last two years, post COVID, we have done some significant forms, predominantly for the government providers to lay the groundwork to say, “How do you improve yourselves to retain the staff and develop them?”. The program that Ms Efthymiades mentioned—I will get the right name—the Early Learning Connection is a really good example of orienting to what people’s needs are. So what are the needs? The traditional trajectory is to build the confidence of staff to do that next bit of qualification and create the space for providers and services to lead improvement. That means the development of staff. That means retaining their staff and having their settings right.

In terms of quality, there are two components that we do as a regulator. One component is assessment and rating, which is a qualitative assessment of the service

against the national quality standard, which has seven areas. That really is a reading of: “How is the service going? How is the provider going?” and supporting the service to have those great interactions with children to develop children and lay a great basis for learning.

The second thing that we do is our auditing program. The whole point of the auditing program is to prevent things from going wrong and to assess that compliance element. The assessment of rating is about quality, and audit is about the prevention of things going wrong and picking up where there may be areas to work on. The two go together. What we have found over the years is that higher quality ratings equal lower issues that evolve.

The other thing that we monitor is the number of early childhood teachers that require a waiver. Under the national law there are ratios for children and teacher capacity for those cohorts of children. You need a waiver if you have not got an early childhood teacher. That is also an opportunity for us to come back to the service and the provider and say, “What is your strategy for your workforce? Do not keep repeating the same thing, because it is not working. Have a think about it.”

**MR HANSON:** Just on that, of the 131 centres, how many are going to be granted a waiver because they have got someone who is in the process of being qualified, as opposed to having someone who is qualified?

**Mr Moysey:** I think that could only be answered in the moment, once it is happening, because the—

**MR HANSON:** I assume that you have given a tick to those 131 that have applied. You know whether they have got someone that is qualified or someone that is not, surely?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Yes. I do not have those figures in front of me.

**MR HANSON:** You can take that on notice. Just say, “Yes; X number of 131 have been granted a waiver.” I assume that there are conditions around a waiver?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** That people—

**Ms Berry:** Which is what Mr Moysey was taking about: what is the strategy for the centre to get that qualification.

**MR HANSON:** Yes; all right. Because we are talking about education, rather than just child care, is there a curriculum for three and four-year-olds?

**Mr Moysey:** Yes. There are approved learning frameworks. There is an improved learning framework for children who are in the early years, and there is an approved learning framework for out of school hours care. That was recently updated, last year or the year before, and that is in play now. It is a well-established framework.

**MR HANSON:** Is that federal?

**Mr Moysey:** Yes; it is under the national law. All states and territories are part of the federated law, which is the national law, and each state and territory applies the national law in its jurisdiction.

**MR HANSON:** Okay.

**Ms Efthymiades:** The early years learning framework is the relevant one for this.

**MR HANSON:** Okay. Good. I am done for now, thanks.

**MS LAWDER:** I would like to touch on the waiver. Generally, for the preschool program, which has degree-qualified early childhood teachers or a transition agreement with the Education Directorate, centres need to be meeting or exceeding the national quality standards for educational programs and practice in governance and leadership. Can all centres in the ACT meet these standards or are they meeting these standards?

**Mr Moysey:** Currently, 67 services are working towards that. I want to stress that the quality ratings are not compliance ratings; they are quality ratings. So the quality work is all the way through until you get to the point where you reach compliance issues. Compliance issues are all set out in the national law, as to what you should comply with, and the quality ratings are about how you are going in reaching the quality standard and all the elements under the standard.

**MS LAWDER:** Is that 67 of the 169?

**Mr Moysey:** That is 67 of all services.

**MS LAWDER:** Which is how many?

**Ms Efthymiades:** That includes all out of school care.

**Mr Moysey:** It includes out of school care.

**Ms Efthymiades:** And all government preschools. So it is a much larger number than that 169.

**Mr Moysey:** I am going to say it is about 53, but I can take that on notice just to clarify the number. It is going to be under 53 services, because the number—

**MS LAWDER:** That are working towards it?

**Mr Moysey:** That are working towards.

**MS LAWDER:** Out of a total of how many possible centres?

**Mr Moysey:** The number of long day care is 179. So it is 179 out of the services that provide explicitly for children aged zero to five.

**MS LAWDER:** And of those 67 services that are working towards it, for example, does that mean they would be working towards one or more or is that 67 working towards?

**Mr Moysey:** Sorry?

**Ms Efthymiades:** They are rated as working towards one of the seven elements.

**MS LAWDER:** Any one, or more?

**Ms Efthymiades:** It is any one. For the three-year-old preschool initiative, we have homed in on the domains that matter most, which is the quality learning one, leadership and governance. They are the three that we deemed, with the regulator, were critical for services to be able to participate. So if they have a “working towards” in one of the other four, that is not going to impact the quality of three-year-old preschool in the same way. Of those, Ms Lawder—and I think this might be the number you might be getting at—there are 16 services who we identified were not eligible to participate now. We are working with those services. The regulator will be working with those services, particularly those that are interested in participating later, to make sure that they can get whatever compliance or quality issues sorted and then be part of the program.

**MS LAWDER:** Of those, could it be that they may not be meeting or they may be working towards just in the past year, or could it have been a longer period?

**Mr Moysey:** Just to give context, the assessment and rating is about a 20-week cycle from the time we notify a service to when we finish the final report. It usually is some years between assessment and rating, so, yes, there are some services that are yet to be assessed because they have been recently established and there are some services that there has been some time to come back to.

When we do our schedule, we weigh all those factors. We weigh when was the last time it was assessed and what might be the issues since we last assessed. Of those that are working towards, it is also graduated because there are 40 quality elements. Under each area there are a range of elements and we go through and look at those qualitatively. Some services are closer to meeting than others. It is quite graduated. Does that answer your question, Ms Lawder?

**MS LAWDER:** Yes.

**Ms Efthymiades:** And the other element is, with the standing up of this initiative, prioritising services who may be able to be considered for three-year-old universal preschool so that we revisit those more quickly than we may have, just to make sure that there is the opportunity.

**MS LAWDER:** For those who have a transition agreement in place, what is the process for monitoring them? How long do these transition periods last for? How long do they have before they have to get up to the relevant standard?

**Ms Efthymiades:** They are annual agreements, so we would be revisiting that, at a minimum, annually. Because 2024 is the first year, we have not locked it in absolutely. We have a thought in mind that two years will be the maximum time you can transition, but we have not hard-coded that in at this point. We will be reviewing each annually and then making some decisions as we start to see how this unfolds, because we do not know yet to what extent. We expect it will be a great incentive for providers to want to participate in this, but we do not know until we see how that plays out through 2024.

**MS LAWDER:** If a centre happened to fail the national quality standards, at least in those three areas of quality learning, leadership and governance that I think you mentioned—or the others—what would happen if, after the two years, they failed to meet them?

**Ms Efthymiades:** I would have to give that proper consideration, but I would anticipate that there may not be a deed for the third year if that were the case. The regulator works so closely with services that I would be surprised if that happens on any scale at all.

**MS LAWDER:** Has that ever happened?

**Mr Moysey:** There is a category called “significant improvement required” which is such a small number over the years. When it does reach that point, if it does, that triggers a much more intensive relationship with the provider and the service. That is part of why we do the audit program. We have such a significant audit program to pick up those issues before they evolve. If it is that bad, there are usually other signs that it is heading in that direction.

It is a sign of governance failing, so it is quality area 7. We know that providers who are strong in quality area 7 around governance have a better capacity to sort themselves out, so that is part of the focus. The overall trajectory is in the right direction. In our regulatory capacity we are always looking to see what more groundwork we can lay to show providers how to get quality services.

When we talk about those who are working towards, it is broken up into different places, where people are at. There are some new providers and they have never done this before. They passed the provider’s test in their first iteration. For others it is about cycling back to improve quality. They know how to do it or they might have a suite of services and one is working towards, so it is about how they are leveraging what they know to cycle back to that service.

**MR HANSON:** Just cycling back to the three-year-olds, the targeted program and the universal program, can someone that is accessing the targeted also access the universal or are they discrete?

**Ms Efthymiades:** They are discrete. The targeted program is for two days, 48 weeks a year, so it is much more comprehensive.

**MR HANSON:** So they cannot then get an extra day as their—

**Ms Efthymiades:** No; however, the providers of that are also in the three-year-old universal program with the quality preschool uplift. Therefore, part of what those three-year-olds get in targeted will be the preschool offering, if you know what I mean. It is not extra hours but the quality and the requirement around a qualified teacher are in the same service, so they will benefit from that, just not extra time.

**MR HANSON:** For four-year-olds we have a targeted program at the moment but nothing else; is that right?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Four-year-olds in public preschool is whoever enrolls in public preschools, so it is—

**MR HANSON:** We have not got a program like this rolled out for four-year-olds in non-government sectors?

**Ms Efthymiades:** In early childhood settings, no, but all four-year-old providers are now eligible for the commonwealth universal access funding, which is a relatively small sliver of the overall funding envelope, but they are eligible for it.

**MR HANSON:** For four-year-olds, then, how many are actually enrolled in government centres. Is everyone just enrolling in a government centre now? What is the percentage, and what is available if you are not in a government centre?

**Mr Moysey:** I can answer the second part.

**MR HANSON:** Is it too hard to answer? You can take that on notice.

**Mr Moysey:** All services that have four-year-olds must provide a four-year-old program. The national law talks about that and says what those requirements are. Historically, the ACT has very high uptake of four-year-olds, whether it is in a service in ACT government preschools or any other service. I think usually we track between 95 and 100 per cent uptake.

**MR HANSON:** In ACT government preschools is that five days a week?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Six hundred hours a year is the consistent national definition of universal access for four-year-olds. I think, Mr Hanson, about 72 per cent of those four-year-olds are in public preschools; then there is another slice that I cannot quantify—sorry, but we can get it on notice for you if you like—in non-government school four-year-old programs; and then there is another slice in the broader early childhood education care sector. Again, though, they are four-year-old preschool programs.

Similar parameters apply for those services to be eligible for the commonwealth universal access money. They must have a qualified teacher in front of the four-year-olds et cetera. We administer it, but we are like a postbox, if you like. We do not control that program, because it is commonwealth money. As Mr Moysey said, our four-year-old uptake is very close to 100 per cent, and some of those children participate in two settings.



**MR HANSON:** Just going back to three-year-olds, for the universal program that is rolling out, is there going to be any form of means testing for parents or is that universal?

**Ms Berry:** No; it is universal.

**Ms Efthymiades:** It is different to having an early childhood program that is not led by a qualified teacher, so it is that quality element. Hence the decision to make it accessible to all.

**MRS KIKKERT:** The total cost for the Child Development Service in 2022-23 was \$7.115 million. In dollars or as a percentage, what portion of this was used to fund the provision for autism assessments?

**Ms Rule:** I am not sure we will be able to break it down into that much granular detail. Mrs Summerrell can certainly give you some more information on autism assessments, but we fund the centres overall and they deliver a whole range of services, including autism assessments. The budget does not work in the sense that there is an amount of money allocated to each of those different services. The budget is allocated to things like staff time and the things that staff need to support their work, but it is not necessarily broken down by assessments like that. Mrs Summerrell can certainly give you some more information on the autism assessments.

**Mrs Summerrell:** As Catherine has said, there is not a specific breakdown that really delineates exactly how much money is spent on ASD. However, I can say that in the most recent budget there was specific funding for HP4 positions for ASD services. In addition to that, funding was allocated to telehealth services in the previous budget, which is specifically for ASD. So there are some specific line items, but the cost of that service more broadly is more than just the staffing costs.

**MRS KIKKERT:** During estimates hearings we heard that \$1.357 million has been appropriated to employ four psychologists to perform autism assessments. Can you please give us an update on how that is going?

**Mrs Summerrell:** Sure. That funding, as you mentioned, was for four HP4s. Positions were advertised. Those positions closed only recently, and we have received applications across all positions that we advertised, which we are assessing now and going through the process.

**MRS KIKKERT:** What is your projection of future demand over the next five years or so—that it will go down, in terms of the waitlist for kids wanting to have an autism assessment, once you employ the psychologists?

**Mrs Summerrell:** If we are able to fill all the positions in an ongoing capacity then that will have a huge impact on our ability to manage the waitlist. The people are in addition to the telehealth funding, so we will still run a telehealth service for those who that works for, and that will still be a pathway, but having the option of face-to-face assessments and having those positions on staff will have a huge impact on the numbers of children that we can see and the time frames that people wait for that service.

**MRS KIKKERT:** How many are currently on the waitlist for autism assessment?

**Mrs Summerrell:** As at 2 November 2023 there were 148 families with children on the waitlist.

**MRS KIKKERT:** What is the longest time frame or average time frame that families have waited for autism assessment?

**Mrs Summerrell:** Currently, children on the waitlist will wait around 12 months for a telehealth assessment and up to 22 months for a face-to-face assessment.

**MRS KIKKERT:** While they are waiting for their assessment, what sort of support are they currently receiving?

**Mrs Summerrell:** I should clarify that that is the point at which they come onto our waitlist. There is a process that they need to go through to get onto our waitlist, which includes being reviewed by our paediatrician. Most often, for our service, it is the community paediatrician. Depending on the pathway that those children take—and there can be a multitude of pathways by which those children come onto our waitlist—if it is a child that is known to us, that has come through our screening programs or come into a drop-in clinic, and that child could benefit from some services and support in that time, depending on their age, they can attend some of our groups. We work very closely with our colleagues in Education as well to support those children in that time frame. You can ask questions of Health around the pathway through their enhanced health services, which is the pathway into the community paediatrician. There are, again, multiple checkpoints in that process for those children.

**MRS KIKKERT:** This may be a question on notice: can you give a breakdown of these 148 families with children that are currently on the waitlist—their age and their sex?

**Mrs Summerrell:** The gender breakdown is 75 per cent male and 25 per cent female. I did check the age breakdown prior to coming in today, because this was a question that you asked last time. I can't provide the answer definitively, but the advice to me is that it is not dissimilar to the information provided to you in answer to the last question taken on notice, which is that the bulk of those children are in the three to four-year age group and the five to six-year age group. There is not a significant change to that.

**MRS KIKKERT:** No significant change?

**Mrs Summerrell:** That is my advice, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Noting the recent introduction of the Education (Early Childhood) Legislation Amendment Bill, what is the importance of providing professional recognition for early childhood educators?

**Ms Berry:** The sector has been calling for professional recognition of their work for decades. Whilst in many ways this is symbolic, it is really meaningful to the sector for

the work that they do.

With the regulations, we heard Mr Moysey go through how highly regulated this sector is, and the requirements on them are significant. It provides the sector with an opportunity to highlight the work that they do, which is as meaningful as in any other aspect of education; in fact, in many ways it is more meaningful to set up a child in those first, early years for future education and a happy adulthood. Having that recognition has been overwhelmingly positively supported by the sector. It is really important.

**MR HANSON:** Will this be administered by TQI and form its own basis for registration and—

**Ms Berry:** There are two parts. The first part is about recognising early childhood teachers as educators within the Education Act. The second part is allowing for early childhood teachers to be registered under the Teacher Quality Institute, the same as other teachers within more formal education, because we are told that a teacher is a teacher, wherever they teach.

With respect to having them be able to register, it is not mandatory in the early childhood space, but it is an opportunity, again, to have the profession recognised, and for them to access all of those different kinds of supports that TQI has, share information, be able to join with other professionals in the education space, share knowledge, tools and professional development opportunities—all of those kinds of things, which they have never really had a chance to access before.

**MR HANSON:** Has any cost gone into this, into the administration of it or—

**Ms Efthymiades:** I do not have that information with us, but we could get it, if you want it.

**MR HANSON:** Yes. There is no cost or training requirement on the individual teacher that will now be getting registered?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Initially, there is to be no cost, we believe, but it is not mandatory as well. Building on all of those things that the minister said, in addition to the valuing of the educators, which is really powerful and symbolic, and the sector has shared with us how important it is to them, there is also the important recognition in the Education Act of the critical role that quality early childhood plays in an education life journey. I do not think we should underestimate that. Everyone knows that families are children's first teachers and early childhood is so critical, yet we have always pretended that education starts when you get to school. That is really symbolic and powerful as well.

**MR HANSON:** Are there any legal ramifications to becoming registered?

**Ms Berry:** Not at this stage. It is just a recognition and an invitation to these professionals to be part of the broader profession of teaching.

**MR HANSON:** Is this a first step, as you see it, towards future mandatory registration

and compliance?

**Ms Berry:** I do not think we have gone that far yet. We are still working on recruiting and retaining the workforce. I think that is the first step; then we will work very closely with the sector about what the future holds. Obviously, there is still a lot of work happening in the sector to advocate for recognition in wages. Those kinds of levers sit pretty much within the federal government's processes, so we will continue to advocate in that space. Through having the recognition in the Education Act, we have recognised that this part of a child's learning, provided by a quality, professional early childhood teacher, is part of a child's education. It is not just about wiping noses and changing nappies. This is an important brain-building process, and we need to recognise the professionals in that space for the work that they do.

**MR HANSON:** Beyond recognition—the symbolic element to that—is there anything else that is part of it? Does it achieve something beyond that? I am not diminishing that. I am just asking whether there is anything beyond that which this actually achieves.

**Mr Moysey:** It is an opportunity to have that curated professional development. By being registered, you get the benefit of TQI's thinking about the professional development program for this year and next year. It is expected, under the national law, that early childhood teachers are contemporary and that they participate in professional development, so registration will offer an opportunity to have that as a curated and organised program, and for providers to be aware of that and to benefit from that, too.

**MR HANSON:** If we are moving to a process of teachers being teachers, why is this going to be voluntary? Why isn't it mandatory?

**Ms Berry:** I think it is at this stage. As I said, Mr Hanson, we are still working on a workforce strategy to recruit and retain teachers. It is not a sector that, at the moment, overwhelmingly has an oversupply, so it is about retaining the teachers that we have, with those opportunities for professional development, and working with the sector about what comes next.

**Ms Efthymiades:** The survey that I mentioned earlier that will be run with the sector will be an opportunity to test the appetite around those kinds of things and get a bit of a read. As the minister says, with making registration mandatory, when you are in a situation where you are building the workforce to the quantum that you need, you have to think about the timing.

**MR HANSON:** What is the engagement process that you will have to inform people about what is available in terms of registration and why they should or should not do it?

**Mr Moysey:** A couple of weeks ago, we had a two-day forum for providers and services on quality early teaching, which included the Chief Executive Officer of TQI, Lyndall Read, speaking to providers about what the bill is doing, and starting that conversation. Through our communication channels, we will be keeping the sector up to date with the developments. Obviously, we have a really good relationship with

TQI in relation to development of teachers, so we will be able to keep up that line of communication.

**MR HANSON:** Who have you engaged with the bill on, in terms of its development?

**Ms Berry:** Early Childhood Australia is the peak body; individual services, community services—

**Ms Efthymiades:** Children First. There is a whole lot of—

**Mr Moysey:** Children First Alliance.

**Ms Berry:** And the United Workers Union as well. It has been quite extensive.

**MR HANSON:** Has anyone raised any concerns? Is everybody on board, or have you had some people say, “Hey, there is an issue here or there”?

**Mr Moysey:** Nationally, there was a policy position, which all jurisdictions agreed to, to head towards registration of early childhood teachers. That is in the national workforce strategy. ACT is one of a number of jurisdictions who are heading to that point.

**Ms Efthymiades:** It is not mandatory—

**Mr Moysey:** Not compulsory, but—

**Ms Efthymiades:** therefore there is not concern about that. As we test with the sector in the census survey how they are feeling about those various things, we will get a better read.

**MR HANSON:** On notice, can you provide a list of who you engaged with?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Sure. We will take that on notice.

**Mr Moysey:** Can I mention one other benefit? For those teachers who are employed by providers who have both a school setting and early childhood, it is a zero to primary school realm for them, so it enables one registration for those.

**MS LAWDER:** Under the legislation, for example, one of the goals is including principles for collaboration and cooperation and encouraging information sharing. Surely, that would be happening now, as a matter of policy and practice, about sharing information. Is that not the case—collaboration and cooperation?

**Ms Berry:** It is not just within the early childhood space but within the education space as well—having that collaborative sharing of professional development. It is also about working with both the early childhood sector and primary schools in particular around that transition pathway from early childhood preschool into kindergarten and into school. There is a whole journey that we are creating here through their registration with the Teacher Quality Institute, and providing this wealth of knowledge, not just from TQI but across sectors.

**MS LAWDER:** Can you give me an example of what that would look like in practice, regarding that cooperation and collaboration?

**Ms Berry:** Mr Moysey might be able to add more to this, but it could be for an early childhood teacher who is working in a service that would be delivering a particular program. A teacher within a preschool setting in those early years, from kindergarten to year 8, might want to learn from the early childhood teacher about different ways that they could utilise education or a plan or a practice that has been utilised within a service that could be transferred into an education setting. That is an example, but there could be a whole range of other ways that could be shared backwards and forwards between different age groups.

**Ms Efthymiades:** Building off what the minister said and then passing to Mr Moysey, through the targeted program, Ms Lawder, we have been building communities of practice which operate across the early childhood education and care settings into the preschools that students transition into. The minister is right; it is all about both the professional learning across the professionals and understanding the child, so that when they go into the new setting there is a really solid foundation and they are not starting from scratch; they have quality information from the educators in the early childhood education and care service, transitioning into the preschool.

We have been trialling and refining those communities of practice through the targeted program over the last few years and they have been getting stronger and stronger; therefore having that as part of this reform, in terms of the bill, is key to that. It is about actually valuing that at the highest order rather than leaving it to chance that it might happen. I will hand over to Mr Moysey.

**Mr Moysey:** There are many examples where professionals have come together and set the best practice about those relationships, and we have learnt from that and how to build that as part of the norm—taking the best practice and turning it into the norm. Ms Efthymiades mentioned the communities of practice coming out of the targeted areas. The continuity of relationships is important, too. Those schools and the services have worked together for many years now, so it becomes a natural relationship.

For those children that have a harder time or where there may be developmental issues, it means that the body of professionals talking about what is best for that child or what is working and not working is bigger, because there are those relationships and you can have those conversations about what works.

We did the trauma-informed training. There is affordable trauma-informed training and there is a community of practice. We will build on what we did with the first iteration of that to build those relationships regarding working with children who are traumatised. That is a positive example.

**MS LAWDER:** You are saying that it does not happen now?

**Mr Moysey:** It does. The intent is to establish those relationships and build the continuity of the relationships. Instead of relying solely on the wisdom of the practitioners who come together, it is about building some structures and saying,

“This is the norm of how we relate,” if that makes sense. It is that continuity that is important.

**Ms Efthymiades:** Greater consistency and more widespread. There are outstanding pockets of practice that help, and there always have been, and we have been building on those. This is now taking it to the full, across the whole.

**MS LAWDER:** We had some recent media about early childhood educators rallying for system changes; they were reaching breaking point and saying that there was a crisis in staffing. What is the current status of staffing for early educators in the ACT?

**Mr Moysey:** Next year there will be another national census. The last national census, which was in 2021 and reported the following year, showed that we have a higher proportion of younger workers. There is a high number of workers in the ACT who are younger than the average around the country. We have more workers with less years of experience in the sector, and we have a higher proportion of the workforce who are paid more, who are paid above award. Those are the three factors that we found ourselves in post COVID.

One of the things that is hard to quantify is the loss of the showing of the ropes, the loss of the practical, day-to-day things—how to take your cert III qualification, diploma qualification or your early childhood teacher qualification and apply it. There has been a break in continuity for showing the ropes. The orientation that we have, from a regulatory perspective and certainly national and ACT government policy, is how to rebuild the workforce, focus on retention and create the space to keep the people we have, and have more people join the workforce.

**Ms Efthymiades:** This is really where the workforce strategy comes into its own. It is there to do all of those things.

**MS LAWDER:** In terms of numbers, where are we this year and how does that compare to last year?

**Mr Moysey:** I do not have any national census numbers. The census is not taken every year.

**MS LAWDER:** You do not know how many early educators we have in the ACT?

**Mr Moysey:** The census counted—

**MS LAWDER:** But this year you do not know how many. I think you said the census was in 2021 and it reported in 2022.

**Ms Moysey:** That is right; reported in 2022. As part of the early childhood strategy, Set up for Success, we are doing another, going out to the sector.

**Ms Efthymiades:** And do our census.

**MS LAWDER:** Are there ACT figures from that census?

**Ms Efthymiades:** No, that is yet to be done.

**Ms Berry:** That is part of this strategy.

**MS LAWDER:** The census in 2021 was reported in 2022.

**Ms Berry:** That is the national census.

**MS LAWDER:** It is not broken down by state and territory?

**Mr Moysey:** It is. I will have to find the figure. 6,297 was the census figure.

**MS LAWDER:** When was the census before that one?

**Mr Moysey:** That was well before, because of the interruption of COVID. I would have to take that on notice, Ms Lawder, but it was well—

**MS LAWDER:** What was the trend between the previous census and that one? Up or down?

**Mr Moysey:** Significantly up. Can I take that on notice? It is here somewhere. I will try to find it while we are answering other questions. In 2012 we had 280 services. For the reporting period it was 372. I have worked out that that is about 10 services a year, and 90 services over nine years growth. For the number of children, there were 13,000 children from zero to five in 2012, and in 2022 that number was almost 19,000. That is a 46 per cent increase. In the context of what we mentioned before, there was a very high per capita uptake of each age cohort in long daycare fees.

**MS LAWDER:** You mentioned that there were three significant findings, including a younger than the national average workforce. Will that continue, do you think? Why are people leaving, potentially? Is it just the entry of more and more younger people or are we losing lots of people at the other end? Does that make sense?

**Mr Moysey:** Yes. I could not give you a breakdown of the age cohorts but we certainly lost people in the older cohorts during COVID.

**MS LAWDER:** What were the reasons given for that?

**Mr Moysey:** The census has not asked people who left, but I think we would find across the workforces, in early childhood and a range of industries and sectors, that when people were in a position to leave or felt that was right for them, they did.

**Ms Efthymiades:** In the pandemic.

**MS LAWDER:** Why are we still getting so many younger people coming through? Is it seen as an attractive occupation? Is it an entry-level occupation? Why is it that we are getting so many more younger people?

**Mr Moysey:** The sector has always attracted younger people. There has always been a group of people who want to work with children. In the early childhood settings, as



opposed to school settings, most people start with a cert III. Most people say, “I’ll come and give it a go and do the cert III.” With those people who enjoy those interactions, of that group, they usually go on to do other qualifications. Of course, particularly with out-of-school-hours care, because out-of-school-hours care is after school hours, that is very appealing for university students, and often what they might be studying might relate to an early childhood experience.

**MR HANSON:** One of the issues in staff recruiting and retention is pay; and, Minister, I recall when there was a coalition government, you would regularly make this an issue and say that the federal government needs to do better. What action have you taken since the change of government in terms of lobbying and public advocacy for an increase in pay for early childhood education?

**Ms Berry:** I still do advocate for increasing pay for early childhood educators, particularly within the early childhood teaching workforce. I have advocated at, I think, nearly every ministers’ meeting that I have been to, and I have said it publicly during the last few weeks and months of announcements that the ACT government and I will continue to that. I am not particularly concerned who is in government, as this is a matter that all of us should be investing in, in the early childhood space, and I will continue to do that.

**MR HANSON:** What is the quantum? Say you have got an early childhood teacher who gets registered under the new legislation and a teacher who is in secondary school or primary school. I know it is a little bit difficult to compare, but if you have someone, let’s say, who is just started in early childhood, compared to someone just started in, let’s say, primary school, at the same point in their career: what is the gap between the early childhood teacher and a registered teacher in the ACT public school system?

**Mr Moysey:** It is highly variable. It really depends—as I said, at the 2021 census, 58 per cent of the workforce was paid above award wages. I think the census looked at 10, 15, 20 per cent above, up to 25.

If I can just go back to the National Workforce Strategy, one of the contract management tasks the ACT government committed to doing in relation to that was contracting Macquarie University to do analysis of workforce pay and conditions. What that research has found is that the funding source, predominantly the Commonwealth, and the industrial relations framework of where that funding goes is highly variable. If we think about the ACT, it will have private entities—large private entities, small private entities, family private entities—and community entities of different levels, school systems and individual schools. When we go into New South Wales and Victoria and Queensland, we have got councils and other community entities, so the variation of the terms of pay and conditions is quite variable.

**MR HANSON:** But how about the EBA? The EBA should be pretty comparable, shouldn’t it?

**Mr Moysey:** The EBA for—

**MR HANSON:** For teachers—let’s say for primary school and early childhood.

**Ms Efthymiades:** You have a constant for primary school, but there is not a constant, as Mr Moysey has just explained, in—

**MR HANSON:** There is no EBA?

**Ms Efthymiades:** All of those are under different industrial arrangements.

**Mr Moysey:** There are so many.

**MR HANSON:** Right.

**Mr Moysey:** There are so many, and then there are all the other things like the other arrangements that are put in place that are not necessarily inherently part of the EBA. As this work has developed, we have found there are actually other arrangements that providers have put in place as encouragements and as other benefits that are not necessarily EBA listed, if that makes sense.

**MR HANSON:** So, is money a problem or not? I mean, given what you have just said there—if there are all these other conditions; if providers are not paying more than the base wage, be it whatever EBA they are on—with the lack of staff, be it through recruiting or retention, how big a factor is money? Do we know? I am not discounting it, but sometimes you can put the money up and it is actually not the issue.

**Ms Berry:** I think one of the issues with the pay is that the difference between the early childhood certificate III starting level to the diploma of teacher education is very small. So for the recognition of those increased qualifications and requirements on teaching and diploma-qualified educators, the difference is a couple of dollars. That is one significant issue with the sector in retaining staff and for them having a career path that is meaningful with wages as well. That is one issue.

The other issue, as we have talked about, is that the sector is highly regulated, and there is a significant workload there for a relatively low paid, qualified worker. Whilst the rates between an early childhood teacher and a teacher in a government primary school will be variable, they are generally less, and their hours are different—the different holidays; all those kinds of things in the school-teaching environment are very different to the early childhood space. So some of it is not pay related; some of it is work related, and that is where we have gone to recognising the sector in the act as well, as a symbolic thing, to try and lift the profession.

Wages definitely form a part of it, and the recognition of the profession has been something that has been called for for decades, and the sector really believes that that will make a difference to the workforce. But there is still a gap between the wages in an early childhood setting compared to a primary school setting and also with the degree qualification requirements as well, because there is a progression you need to make from early childhood to be able to work in a primary school setting, which we can go through if you like, or somebody might be able to.

**MR HANSON:** With the various levels of training, who is providing that in the ACT? For a cert III is that CIT or other private providers?

**Mr Moysey:** There are a range—

**MR HANSON:** A whole variety?

**Mr Moysey:** of registered training organisations that will provide cert III, cert IV and diploma.

**MR HANSON:** Yes.

**Mr Moysey:** And there are many around the country, including at University of Canberra, that will provide early childhood tertiary qualifications.

**MR HANSON:** And are all of these qualifications done whilst staff members are working? I am presuming you do not go off to UC and do a degree—you are getting that as you go; is that generally the model?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Yes, they are usually in situ, and the earlier minister spoke about the compensation given to a service so that they can backfill somebody. It is not for the entirety of that time. It is not for every study hour and all those kinds of things, but it is absolutely for the practicum, because they need to be somewhere to have their practical experience, and that absolutely has to be backfilled, and then other considerations are given depending on circumstance.

**MR HANSON:** For the training, is the cost met either by the individual or by the—

**Ms Efthymiades:** We have an existing scholarship program. Government has had that for a number of years now, and it is 12 scholarships per year to a maximum value of \$25,000. We have had four people get all the way through that and graduate in situ. We have 39 in process, and each year there are another 12 that become available, et cetera. Within the \$25,000, there is a \$4,000 allowance to backfill the individual while they are on their practicum area.

**MR HANSON:** And what is the demand for that scholarship?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Relative to the 12 each year?

**Mr Moysey:** It is healthy—

**MR HANSON:** I imagine that you would get a lot of people wanting that, wouldn't you?

**Mr Moysey:** Yes, we offer 16 a year and two sessions—one in the first half of the year and a second half of the year offer. People are very interested in it, and—

**MR HANSON:** And that is six in each, is it?

**Mr Moysey:** Sorry, there are eight.

**MR HANSON:** Eight.

**Mr Moysey:** There are 16 a year and we split it into eight and eight.

**MR HANSON:** Right.

**Mr Moysey:** Most people who are taking it up are electing to do their qualification part time, so that gets you to eight years. The other thing is that we have seen a big shift in Commonwealth support for vocational and tertiary, which we are compiling into something almost like a menu, if you like. We are trying to build that compilation to enable providers and services to make those choices, and for staff to make those choices, that best fit their needs. I know states and territories are very happy about the—

**MR HANSON:** How do you select someone for a scholarship? Who makes that decision about who gets a scholarship or not?

**Mr Moysey:** We put out the applications and then we have a process to work through against the criteria for the scholarships—

**MR HANSON:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** How many people apply? Do you know?

**Mr Moysey:** I would have to take that on notice for each cycle of application—

**MR HANSON:** Yes, could you for each cycle.

**Mr Moysey:** Yes.

**Ms Efthymiades:** Sure.

**MR HANSON:** Because I am just trying to work it out as a percentage.

**Ms Efthymiades:** And just clarifying for the record: I was incorrect when I said 12; it is 16. Mr Moysey is absolutely right—sixteen per year.

**MR HANSON:** Sixteen, yes.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Is that for a full scholarship or partial scholarship?

**Ms Efthymiades:** Full; \$25,000.

**Mr Moysey:** It is full—\$25,000.

**MR HANSON:** Yes, good. And then if you will let me know how many people actually apply.

**Mr Moysey:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** Great, thanks; let the committee know, I should say.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Just following up on that question. If someone receives a childcare educator qualification interstate, would they be able to practise here in the ACT, or would they need another certificate additional to that?

**Mr Moysey:** Under the national law, there is a body called the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, which is the national body, and part of that national body's role is to create the context for consistency around the country, which includes approving all of the tertiary and vocational qualifications. If you want to be on a ACECQA's list, you apply and there is a process. There is a very large list of qualifications that are approved. Basically, if you are approved on the ACECQA list you can practise anywhere where there is national law.

**Ms Berry:** You do still have to get your working with vulnerable people card here.

**Ms Efthymiades:** Yes, you have to go through your local—

**Mr Moysey:** Yes, all those things would still apply.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Okay, great; thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Kikkert, you are up.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Thank you, Chair. One of the future directions mentioned on page 87 of the annual report is to refine the expanded CDS service pathway for 24- to 36-month-old children, as this service scales up to capacity. This expansion has been up and running since February. What is the feedback so far, and what refinements have you already made as a result?

**Ms Berry:** The Child Development Service?

**MRS KIKKERT:** Yes.

**Mrs Summerrell:** Thank you; I can answer that. The service has been in operation since February; you are absolutely correct there. There was a period of time where we recruited to those positions, and that took some time in the establishment also. The feedback so far is incredibly positive. As at today, the 13th, we have seen 193 children.

**MRS KIKKERT:** One hundred and ninety-three?

**Mrs Summerrell:** One hundred and ninety-three children—yes, that is our most recent figure. Overwhelmingly, mostly they are in the discipline of speech, closely followed by OT. And, as I mentioned, the feedback has been very positive. It is a welcome addition and is making a huge difference to the lives of those children who do access that pathway.

In terms of the changes and the refinements that we have made, as with the establishment of any program, you start and you think “this is how it is going to work”, and there are always little things that happen where you think “that is not quite

working the way that we thought”, and you change things.

One of the things that we can offer across that program is the full multidisciplinary service. So one of the things that we did look at, after we started, was how we assess children coming in a way that is really efficient so that they can have one assessment and we can say, “Yes, okay, you might need speech, OT and physio.” Because children present to us often with one issue, and they can be seen for that issue, and then, as they are being seen, it becomes evident that perhaps there are other issues as well.

So a child might come, for example, to one of our child and family centre speech drop-in clinics with a speech-related issue and then, part way through their speech program, it might become evident that actually they could benefit from OT or physio. How we do that initial screening so that we do not have that lapse in time from that initial assessment is something that we have been working on as well, so children, where they may have multiple complexities, can go into a multidisciplinary pathway as quickly as possible. Just little things like that; there are other things like—

**MRS KIKKERT:** Big things, though!

**Mrs Summerrell:** Yes.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Yes, they are very important.

**Mrs Summerrell:** Something like this makes a big difference to the lives of little people and their families, so it is important that we get it right as well.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Yes, absolutely. So currently the therapy services provided to those two- to three-year-old children are speech therapy and occupational therapy?

**Mrs Summerrell:** And physio.

**MRS KIKKERT:** And physio?

**Mrs Summerrell:** Yes—speech, OT and physio.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Okay. Anything else or is that it?

**Mrs Summerrell:** At this stage, that is it.

**MRS KIKKERT:** At this stage?

**Mrs Summerrell:** Yes.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Okay, great; thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I suggest we might call it closed so that we can all get in and out in time—

**Ms Berry:** Chair, just before you finish, we have something.

**Mr Moysey:** In relation to Ms Lawder's question, the 2016 census had 5,170 staff.

**MS LAWDER:** Thanks

**THE CHAIR:** On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and officials for your attendance today. We also thank broadcasting and Hansard for their support.

If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliament portal as soon as practical and no later than five business days after the hearing.

**The committee adjourned at 2.26 pm.**